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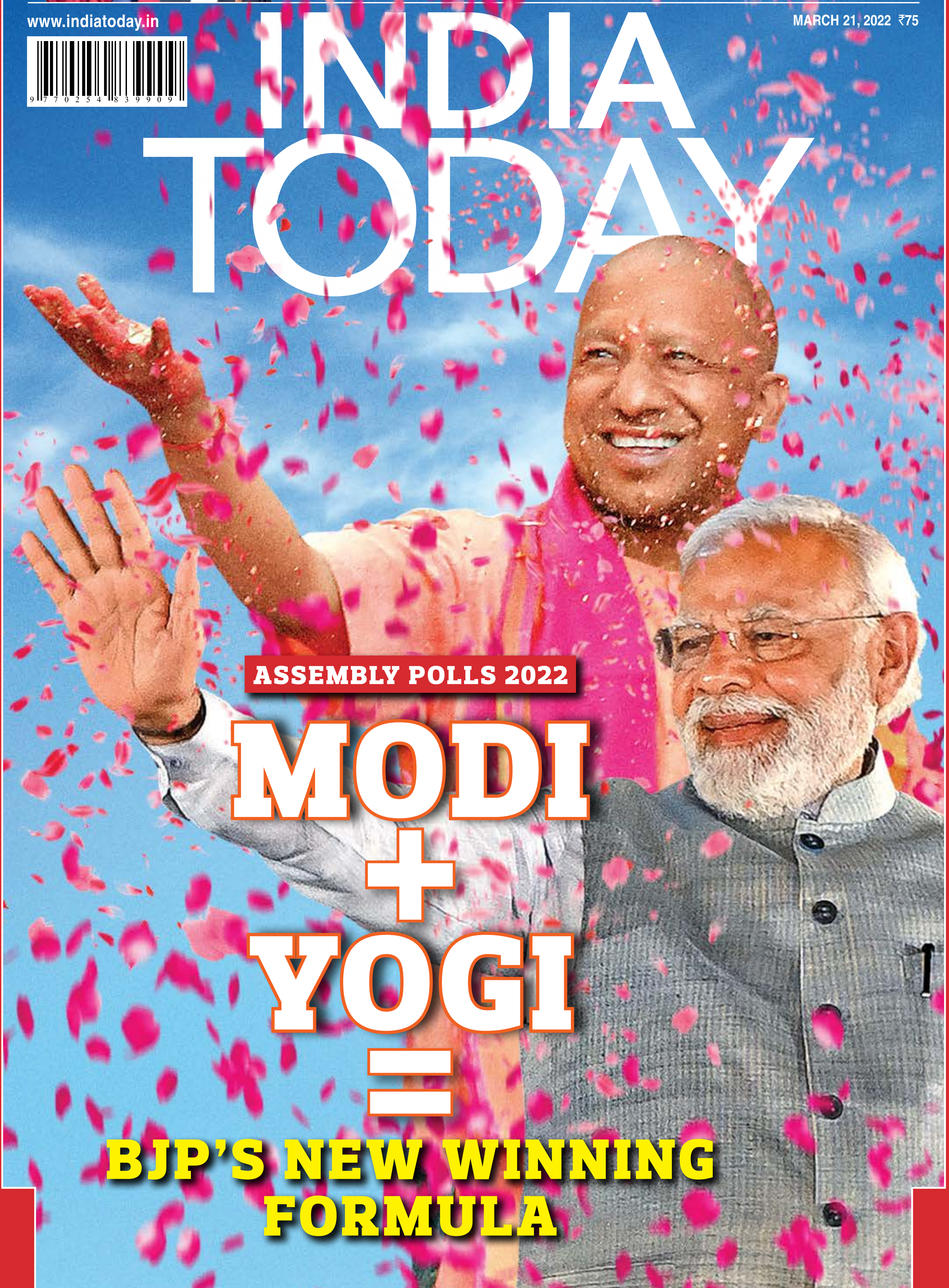

ASSEMBLY POLLS 2022

MODI + YOGI = BJP'S NEW WINNING FORMULA

RNI NO. 28587/75 REGISTERED NO. DL(ND)-11/6068/2021-22-2023; LICENSED TO POST WPP NO. U(C)-88/2021-23; FARIDABAD/05/2020-22

Published on every Friday of Advance Week; Posted at LPC Delhi — RMS — Delhi — 110006 on Every Friday & Saturday; Total number of Pages 68 (including cover pages)

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FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

There seems to be a kind of internal life force that propels the BJP. An appetite for ceaseless growth and domination—a raging fire in the belly—that is absent in the others, most conspicuously in the Congress. On March 10, 2022, on the evening of another stunning set of victories in assembly elections, the state Prime Minister Narendra Modi took care to talk about was Punjab—the only one out of five where the BJP had come up short. That inner drive could not have been better expressed. For the BJP under Modi, failure only carves out a future project for success, a call to redoubled action. The sense the party exudes is that of an unstoppable force. It is as if the Indian landscape itself is readjusting itself in a more rightward space to accommodate it.

Uttar Pradesh has spoken. The message of the 'double-engine sarkar'—Modi+Yogi, which was propagated aggressively in the election campaign—has yielded bountiful results for the BJP. This was despite a host of perceived negative factors. Farmer anger, joblessness, the devastation wrought by Covid and the problem of stray cattle were all outweighed by the positive buzz created by the double-engine formula. India's politically most dominant state has given us what is now another undeniable presence, that of Yogi Adityanath, who came to be known in the election campaign as 'Bulldozer Baba' because of his strong stand on law and order. Well, this monk created history by practically driving 38 million voters straight to the polling booth with a single wish: to vote BJP. That's nearly 9 million more than what the Samajwadi Party managed. In the process, Yogi has become the first chief minister of UP ever to be re-elected after a full term in office. The results validate the findings of the India Today-Axis My India exit poll. People chose 'development' as their number one reason for going with the BJP—highways are a visible index of that, not an abstract reality but one within the individual voter's lived experience. So are the second and third reasons: law and order and welfare schemes. Free rations, flowing from a policy idea crafted by Amit Shah, have played an undeniable role in placating voter ire on other fronts, and a sense of security is simply one of those most basic aspects of everyday life—it has elements that surpass the communal. What the Modi regime does extremely well is drill home the message of development while managing the caste equations at the micro level. What we are seeing, in reality, is the birth of a new constituency of voters who are the beneficiaries of welfarism, mainly the poor. It's a constituency that overrides caste, with an underpinning of Hindutva. The women, in particular, are part of this new vote bank.

INDIA TODAY
THE REPUBLIC OF MODI

June 3, 2019

INDIA TODAY
CAN YOGI MAKE HISTORY?

February 7, 2022

Voters in four other states have also spoken. The story here is indisputably Brand Modi. The aura that Modi lends to the BJP is that of a phenomenal vote-catcher. In Uttarakhand or Goa, for instance, the chief ministerial face made no difference—in fact, it hardly mattered that the incumbent may have been weak or, indeed, a liability. Both states were seen to be beset with problems and voter anger. Beginning from exactly March 10 last year, the hill state has seen three CMs—and with Pushkar Dhami losing his personal contest, it may see a fourth. Will Dhami or Goa CM Pramod Sawant be back or not? It is nearly immaterial.

The woeful state of the party the BJP has supplanted in the role of the 'natural party of governance', the Congress, is nowhere more starkly manifest than in Manipur, where the victorious chief minister, N. Biren Singh, and a dozen winning candidates of the BJP are former members of the INC. That is the reason why these results carry a lot more weight than just what they mean for these individual states. The momentum for 2024 is firmly set. The fate of Akhilesh Yadav—who gave the fight of his life and came up with his party's best-ever vote share at 32.1 per cent, and yet faced that massive deficit in overall numbers—holds ominous lessons for the Opposition. In our main essay, Group Editorial Director Raj Chengappa examines how a national climate has been set by these results. The internal dynamics of the BJP are also interesting to watch here, with the rise of Yogi.

The other stunning story is, of course, Punjab and the way the Aam Aadmi Party has created a new narrative of anti-elitism. On the battlefield lie the bruised egos of all manner of traditional politicians, trounced by total newcomers, salt of the earth. Arvind Kejriwal is now the only non-BJP, non-Congress figure with two states under his control—even if Delhi is only 'half a state', it has a salience much beyond its size or governance structure. What does this mean for the future trajectory of India's politics? With the simultaneous decline in Congress's fortunes, there is talk of AAP becoming 'the alternative'. Of course, the party is nowhere near the ecstatic heights it registered a decade ago, but it has clawed its way back into contention. Deputy Editor Kaushik Deka discusses the long way it has to travel—India still lies ahead of AAP as a largely unknown truth.

It is increasingly clear as we approach the 11 state elections left to go in the run-up to the general election of 2024 that we reside in what we had described in our cover story dated June 3, 2019, after the BJP's re-election at the Centre, as The Republic of Modi. At the moment, it seems it is the age of TIMO. There is Modi Only.

(Aroon Purie)

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Volume XLVII Number 12; For the week March 15-21, 2022, published on every Friday

- Editorial/Corporate Office Living Media India Ltd., India Today Group Mediaplex, FC-8, Sector-16A, Film City, Noida - 201301; Phone: 0120-4807100
- Subscriptions: For assistance contact Customer Care India Today Group, C-9, Sector-10, Noida (UP)-201301; Phones: Toll-free number: 1800 1800 100 (from BSNL/MTNL lines); (95120) 2479900 from Delhi and Faridabad; (0120) 2479900 from Rest of India (Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.); Fax: (0120) 4078080; Mumbai: 022-66063411/3412, Kolkata: 033-40525327, Chennai: 044-24303200; e-mail: *wecare@intoday.com*
- Sales: Direct all trade enquiries to General Manager (Sales), Living Media India Limited, C-9, Sector-10, Noida-201301 (UP)
- Regd. Office: F-26, First Floor, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001.
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Printed and published by Manoj Sharma on behalf of Living Media India Limited. Printed at Thomson Press India Limited, 18-35 Milestone, Delhi Mathura Road, Faridabad-121007, (Haryana). Published at F-26, First Floor, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001.

Editor: Raj Chengappa.

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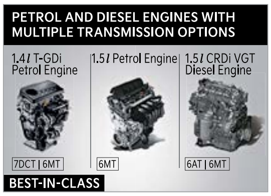
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ODISHA: NAVEEN PATNAIK'S WINNING HABIT PG 10

UPFRONT

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NATO CLOSE THE SKY
NATO CLOSE THE SKY
HANDS OFF
STOP WAR

CALL FOR PEACE
A protest in Istanbul, Turkey, against Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Mar. 6

KEMAL ASLAN/REUTERS

SANCTIONS ON RUSSIA

THE INDIAN BYPASS

By M.G. Arun

The sanctions imposed by the US and other nations on Russia in the aftermath of its invasion of Ukraine will not just hurt Russia but several other countries, including India, that have strong bilateral trade connections with the country. Trade between India and Russia stood at $9.4 billion or Rs 72,192 crore in the April-December 2021 period. Key imports include defence equipment, crude oil, mineral oils, agricultural products, coal, pearls, fertilisers and nuclear reactors.

India imported $2 billion or Rs 15,360 crore worth of crude oil from Russia between April and December last year. While there is no ban yet on the imports of crude from Russia, the issue is with the way payments are being made. A range of Russian banks have been cut out of the SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) international payments system by the European Union, the US, UK and Canada, in a bid to choke Russia's trade with the world. An alternative to this payments protocol could be Russia's own SPFS (System for Transfer of Financial Messages), which the country developed after the West threatened to cut it off from SWIFT in 2015. However, it is not clear if this alternative payment mechanism has been approved by India. Desperate Russian companies are reportedly offering heavy discounts, of over 25 per cent, to India on crude oil imports at a time when Brent crude oil has crossed $130 a barrel. State-run Rosneft is one of the biggest oil companies that supply crude to India. In December 2021, Rosneft and Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) signed a contract to supply up to two million tonnes of oil to India through

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the Black Sea port of Novorossiysk by end 2022. This is miniscule compared to the 196.5 million tonnes of crude India imported in 2020-21. It was a strategy to diversify India's crude basket, which was heavily dependent on West Asia.

It will be tough for India to open an alternative funding arrangement since it will be perceived to be funding the invasion of Ukraine. IOC has already said it will no longer accept cargos of Russian crude oil and Kazakh CPC (Caspian Pipeline Consortium) Blend on a free-on-board basis (FOB) due to insurance risks. Operations in the Black Sea have been affected after several ships were hit, making insurers hesitant to give cover to shipping majors in the region. In an FOB mechanism, it is the buyer who charters a vessel and lifts the crude from a terminal in the producing country and pays for the cost of shipping.

India, however, will not summarily cut off ties with Russia, experts say. "The political position that India has taken shows that we are in no mood to decouple from Russia," says Biswajit Dhar, professor, Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. "Arms are particularly a problem since India has made a commitment to buy them and Russians have been planning to make them here." Over 90 per cent of the equipment for the Indian Army's requirements, 65 per cent of the air force's needs and 41 per cent of the navy's, is of Russian origin. In addition, deals worth over $15 billion or Rs 1.15 lakh crore are in the pipeline for ships, aircraft, tanks, assault rifles and missiles. Given the security threats India faces, especially from China, it will continue to seek ways to import from Russia. To facilitate this, it could look at a rupee-rouble arrangement for government-to-government transactions through a designated bank acting as a trading house. When the US and EU imposed major oil-related sanctions in 2012 to pile pressure on Iran over its nuclear programme, India had designated Kolkata-based UCO Bank as the payment bank. The account reportedly maintained deposits in Euros, avoiding exposure to the US banking system. The bigger threat, says Dhar, is western countries discussing a ban on Russian commodities, which could further inflate prices of oil and other commodities across the globe. It could also potentially hurt India's nascent recovery. Russia is the world's largest exporter of wheat, accounting for more than 18 per cent of global exports. A ban on Russian wheat can stoke inflation in Europe.

TRICKY BUSINESS

$9.4 billion (₹72,192 crore)

TRADE BETWEEN India and Russia during April-December 2021

KEY IMPORTS: Defence equipment, crude oil, mineral oils, agriculture products, coal, pearls, fertilisers and nuclear reactors

KEY EXPORTS: Electrical machinery and equipment, pharmaceutical products, nuclear reactor parts and organic chemicals

ALTERNATIVE PAYMENT MODES

↘ A rupee-rouble arrangement for government-to-government transactions through a designated bank, which will act as a trading house

↘ SPFS (System for Transfer of Financial Messages) which Russia developed after the West raised threats to cut it off from SWIFT in 2015

7 million barrels

Crude oil shipped out of Russia per day

18%

Share of Russia in global wheat supplies

"If sanctions are imposed on crude oil imports from Russia, it will take seven million barrels of oil a day out of world markets," says Prashant Vasisht, vice-president and co-head, corporate ratings, ICRA. "No one can replace that, not even Iran if it comes back into the market." India had been largely compliant to such sanctions. Vasisht says that in the case of Iran, which used to supply oil to India at a lower rate, India sought special permission from the then Obama administration to import Iranian crude oil. Such a scenario is unlikely in the present case, says Vasisht.

Meanwhile, exports to Russia from India included $407 million or Rs 3,093 crore worth of electrical machinery and equipment, pharmaceutical products, nuclear reactor parts and organic chemicals, among other things. As much as 13 per cent of India's tea exports go to Russia. With Russian banks excluded from SWIFT, businesses are worried about payments and recovery of outstanding amounts. Media reports say that the government is still in the process of reviewing the sectors likely to be hit the hardest by the sanctions and is planning ways and means to deal with it. The process of listing out all Russian entities covered under American, European as well as UN sanctions will be tedious.

According to Neelam Deo, co-founder and director of foreign policy think-tank Gateway House, western sanctions against Russia may have some impact on investments by Indian public sector undertakings such as the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and GAIL Ltd, and perhaps discourage Indian companies planning to expand operations in Russia. "However, considering the importance of gas exports to Europe and the scale of investments by western companies, it is unlikely that sanctions on Russia will be taken to as punitive a level as with Iran," she adds. Many of India's pharmaceutical companies have offices in Ukraine, with plans for expansion into Eastern Europe. The anticipated impact of western sanctions on India is less grim for this industry; pharmaceuticals are usually exempt, anyway. At the moment, there are few certainties about developments in Ukraine, with some fearing a protracted war that could pose a serious threat to economies as they emerge from the shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic. ■

GLASSHOUSE

DOWN THE CHUTE

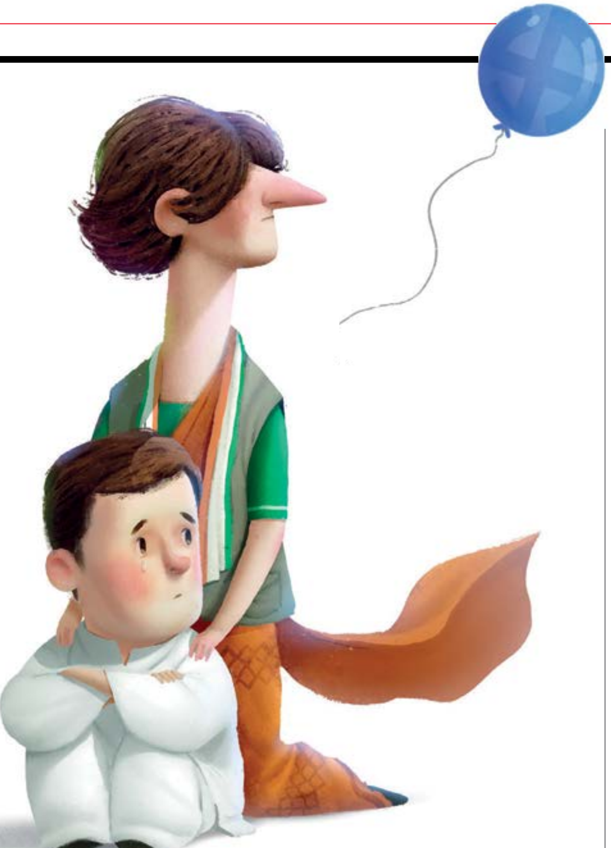

Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

Rahul Gandhi's likely coronation as Congress president seems to have hit more roadblocks—losing Punjab and the continuation of a disastrous run in Uttar Pradesh. While Rahul oversaw affairs in Punjab, Priyanka Gandhi was in-charge of Uttar Pradesh. The losses have emboldened the anti-Gandhis factions within the party, who have more reason now to oppose the Gandhi scion's ascent to party presidency. The defeats will also likely impact the party members in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh who were pinning their hopes on the Gandhi siblings' intervention to replace incumbent CMs Ashok Gehlot and Bhupesh Baghel. In other bad news, Opposition parties now are unlikely to accept a Congress name as their common candidate for the presidential election scheduled in July.

Playing Defence

VIKRAM SHARMA

The observation made by the Bombay High Court on February 27 that NCP chief **Sharad Pawar** had used his influence and clout in the construction of Lavasa, the controversial hill city that came up near Pune in 2009, left him shocked. Anticipating that the BJP would be sure to bring this up, on March 2, Pawar explained his side of the story to 169 legislators at a meeting of the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi. According to a Congress leader, Pawar spent more than half the meeting, which was called to chalk out the ruling alliance's strategy, defending himself. The controversy has certainly put the NCP chief on the back foot.

WHAT'S COOKING?

On March 4, shortly after meeting his Jharkhand counterpart **Hemant Soren** in Ranchi, Telangana chief minister **K. Chandrashekar Rao** confirmed having held a political discussion with him, but claimed it should not be seen as an attempt to build an anti-BJP or anti-Congress front. The Twitter-savvy Soren retweeted some pictures of the meeting, but said nothing of what transpired. Speculation is rife that the meeting was to find consensus on a candidate for the presidential election.

ANI

—Kaushik Deka with Kiran D. Tare, Amitabh Srivastava and Amarnath K. Menon

COALITION ADHARMA

The sweet taste of success that the ruling DMK enjoyed after its thumping victory in the urban local bodies election in Tamil Nadu has turned a bit sour for CM **M.K. Stalin**. He had directed that 94 posts of mayor and deputy mayor, municipal and deputy chairmen, president and vice-president in 21 corporations, 138 municipalities and 489 town panchayats would be for the party's coalition partners, but DMK functionaries got themselves elected instead. After his allies complained that the coalition dharma had been flouted, an angry Stalin directed the rebels to quit, saying, "As a party leader, I feel guilty and ashamed." Those who don't resign face dismissal from the party.

Atmanirbhar Gujarat

Gujarat finance minister **Kanu Desai** has estimated that the Centre's grant to the state will dip by 41 per cent in 2022-23. The state had received Rs 27,178 crore from the Union government in 2021-22. The amount will be Rs 15,982 crore in the next financial year. The reduced central assistance would usually be considered a setback for the state government in an election year, but Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel is planning to claim it as an achievement. The state government says lower grants from Delhi are an indication that Gujarat is becoming less dependent on central funds, which is a sign of a healthy state economy.

ODISHA

THE WINNING HABIT

By Romita Datta

A strange sort of veneration confronts you when you mention Naveen Patnaik in Odisha. Biju Janata Dal MP Amar Patnaik gets a little emotional when he says, “He is like family: a grandfather to children, father to many, brother to women.”

It perhaps explains the 75-year-old BJD patriarch’s uninterrupted run in the state for the past 22 years. Be it parliamentary elections or for assembly, municipal or even rural bodies, his party sweeps them all with mandates so comprehensive that other parties seem like extras in some Naveen Patnaik show.

So it was with the latest panchayat elections (held from February 16-24), where the BJD won 766 of the 851 zilla parishad zones, while the BJP and Congress managed inconsequential tallies of 42 and 37 seats, respectively. While the Congress did retain 60 per cent of the seats it won last time, the BJP saw a massive erosion of its base in the Mayurbhanj, Malkangiri and Kalahandi areas, with its tally plunging from the 297 seats won in the 2017 panchayat poll.

Naveen has indeed rendered anti-incumbency an alien word in Odisha’s politics. From the time Biju Patnaik’s youngest child took over the reins of the state after his father’s death in 1997, forming the Biju Janata Dal soon after and becoming the chief minister in 2000, extensive social welfare has been integral to state politics. Amar Patnaik lauds him for standing strong and tall, “someone who can be trusted to stand with people in bad weather”. That reference is more than just metaphorical. Naveen has helped his people weather some 20 storms and cyclones in his 22-year stint, to implement a ‘Zero Casualty Mission’.

ANI

STANDING TALL
On his father Biju Patnaik’s 106th birth anniversary, Mar. 5

His commitment remains unwavering as he serves out a fifth term. Thanking the people after his party’s landslide win in the panchayat polls, Naveen said it strengthened his resolve to do public service. The CM’s social welfare schemes have only enhanced his popularity. Not only has he rolled out fresh schemes but also redesigned existing ones to expand their reach. The Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana, for instance, now serves 70 per cent of the state’s population. Initially providing health insurance of up to Rs 5 lakh annually to a family of five, it now includes an additional annual assistance of Rs 5 lakh for women members of each such family. “Every day, one lakh people, covered under this scheme, are getting treatment in government hospitals while another 30,000 are being treated in private hospitals, which include big names like Apollo, CMC Vellore and Tata Memorial,” says chief secretary Suresh Mahapatra. “The government is spending Rs 40 crore a month and we are looking to increase it to Rs 600-1,000 crore a year.”

THE BJD WON AN INCREDIBLE 766 OF THE 851 ZILLA PARISHAD ZONES IN THIS YEAR’S PANCHAYAT POLLS

Mahapatra also believes that the state government’s management of the Covid pandemic tilted the scale in the BJD’s favour. The government claims to have provided free medical treatment to over 100,000 Covid patients, irrespective of any cap on income. “About 4,000-15,000 people got admitted for treatment on a daily basis, depending on the intensity of Covid,” says Mahapatra. “The government spent Rs 2,000 crore.” Throughout the pandemic, Odisha also doggedly pursued the rehabilitation of migrant workers, setting up health camps and shelters for them, providing dry rations and cooked food, even a monthly allowance.

The blueprint for supply of piped water to 10 million households as well as the promise of electricity in every household have also cemented Naveen’s image as a welfarist CM.

Dubbing this the Odisha model of inclusive development, Amar Patnaik claims the state has seen poverty alleviation of 31 per cent in the past 20 years. “It hasn’t happened through direct money transfer but by making more disposable income available to all,” says the BJD MP, in a veiled reference to the central government’s emphasis on direct benefit transfers. “Provision for food security to 92 per cent of the population, health for 77 per cent and access to smart education naturally create opportunities for extra income.”

Voting for Naveen Patnaik, therefore, seems to have become a habit for the people of Odisha. He too seems content serving the people of his state, eschewing a larger pan-India role, and not because he does not command huge respect on the national stage. ■

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RAJASTHAN

Raje’s Show of Strength

By Rohit Parihar

On March 8, thousands of people attended a celebration at a temple in Rajasthan’s Keshoraipatan, on the occasion of former chief minister Vasundhara Raje’s 69th birthday. Ostensibly a personal affair, the huge gathering of fans and BJP workers was also a reminder, an assertion of the former CM’s continuing political relevance.

Though Raje is a national vice president of the BJP, the party high command has sent few tasks her way since she lost the Rajasthan assembly election in December 2018. Her relations with the party’s state unit are also frosty: state chief Satish Poonia and organisation secretary Chandrashekhar have largely been calling the shots, along with Rajendra Singh Rathore, deputy leader of the opposition and others from the anti-Raje camp. No one from Raje’s camp has a major post in the state unit.

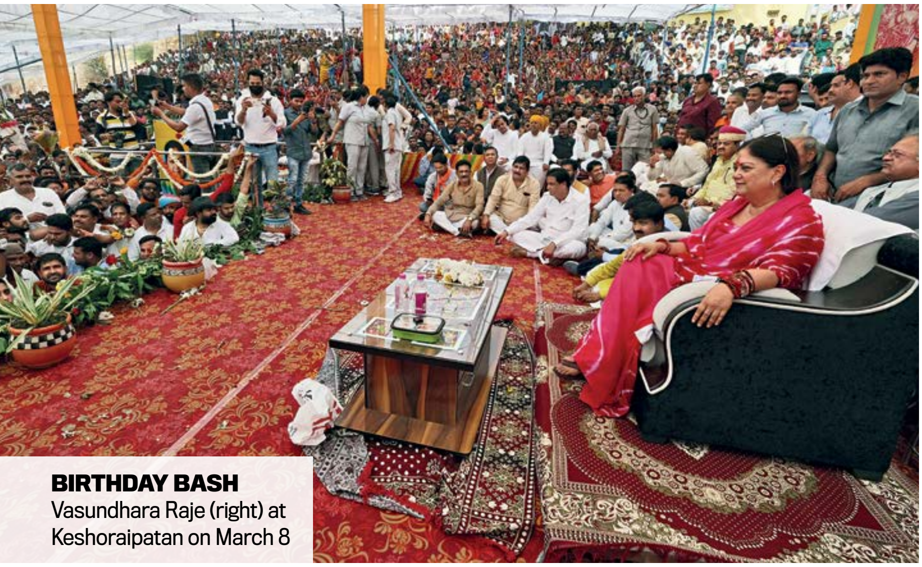
Raje herself has kept a low profile in recent years—that is, until November last year, when she made a string of public appearances at temples across five districts, gathering party workers and visiting the families of prominent leaders. The public response to her outreach has been noteworthy, but it has also stoked tensions with the state unit. In an alleged effort to prevent MLAs from attending Raje’s birthday celebrations, it called a legislative meet on the day, but many MLAs chose to simply skip it. “Why is she challenging the state unit?” asks a BJP MP, asking to remain anonymous. “She does not need to. She is our leader, and we need her to come back to power.” Some, like former parliamentary secretary Bhawani Singh Rajawat and former minister Rajpal Singh, have openly asked for Raje to be given charge.

> **ON MARCH 8, MANY BJP LEGISLATORS SKIPPED A MEETING OF THE STATE UNIT TO ATTEND RAJE’S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION**

Perhaps Raje is willing to ruffle feathers simply to remind the party high command of her importance in Rajasthan, where the next assembly election is just a year away. The BJP has few heavy hitters in the state. Though it has some big names—like Om Birla, speaker of the assembly, and Ashwini Vaishnaw, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and Bhupendra Yadav, all cabinet ministers—none is a match for Raje when it comes to mobilising voters. Shekhawat is the only one to have demonstrated some ability to pull crowds, playing an instrumental role in making a Rajput rally under the Shri Kshatriya Yuvak Sangh banner in December a major success. What is also in Raje’s favour is her proven skill at riding waves of anti-incumbency against the Gehlot government. In 2003, she led the party to a 120-seat haul in the 200-seat assembly, a record for the BJP. In 2013, she did it again, setting a new record with a 163-seat haul. And as CM, she has fared better than Gehlot when it comes to anti-incumbency—though the BJP lost the state assembly in 2018, the vote difference with the Congress was a meagre 150,000.

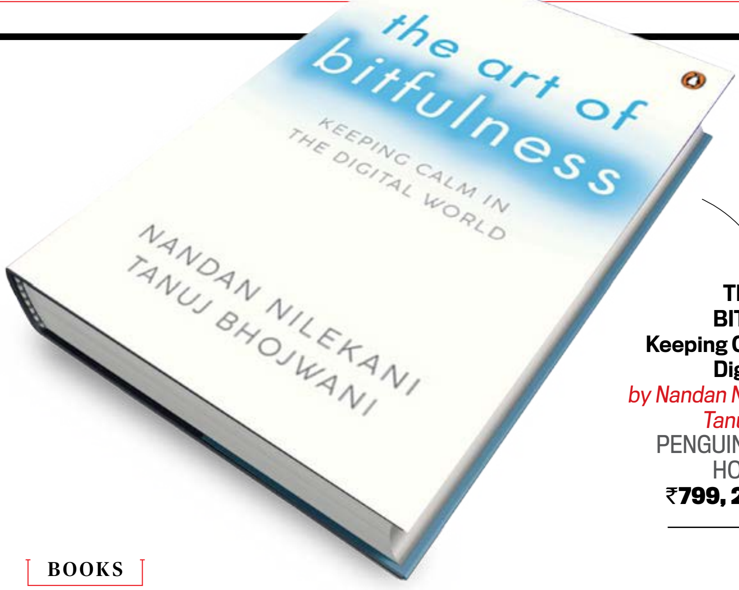
What should worry the BJP high command is its recent record at elections in the state. A series of elections in recent months showed the BJP unable to win seats or even secure respectable vote shares. In seven recent assembly bypolls in the state, the BJP was only able to win one seat. In urban local body polls, it is down about 10 per cent in seat count compared to its performance in 2014-15. In panchayat polls, it is down about 7.5 per cent. Experts say this just shows how badly the BJP needs Raje.

At her birthday celebration on March 8, her enduring magnetism was on full display. That she was able to electrify the audience, even drawing MLAs away from a state unit meeting, was ample proof that the former chief minister is eyeing a comeback. ■



BIRTHDAY BASH
Vasundhara Raje (right) at Keshoraipatan on March 8

PURUSHOTTAM DIWAKAR



THE ART OF BITFULNESS
Keeping Calm in the Digital World
by Nandan Nilekani and Tanuj Bhojwani
PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE INDIA
₹799, 236 pages

BOOKS

PRISONERS OF OUR OWN DEVICE

By Prasanto K. Roy

I hadn't paid attention to the curious title when I started reading this book. So when I came across *bitfulness* a few pages down, I asked, what the heck is this? It sounded silly. Did such a word even exist?

The trouble with reading on a phone app is that you can touch any word for a web search. I was instantly taken to author interviews on YouTube, where I also saw and clicked on an air-crash investigation, then returned and touched a link to the book on the Amazon app. There, I found an alert for some coffee beans I had been looking for, bought those...and soon I'd forgotten about the book and the review I'd promised.

The coffee arrived three days later and reminded me of the book, so I ground the beans and brewed coffee, and started reading again: this time on my Kindle device, which has fewer distractions. It took me a few pages to figure out that the book was about those distractions, and about dealing with them. Switching contexts and apps is easy and fun, but it has cognitive costs. It's hard to get back to what you were doing before the interruption. I'd probably check email or Twitter before getting back to the task. Often, I might not get back to it at all. Yet our devices are designed to let us switch rapidly between our multiple identities.

This book is an attempt at fixing the relationship we have with our digital tools, by looking at both sides of the equation. We think of bitfulness as the ability to spend our time on our devices better.

I was sceptical: my inner cynic waved red flags. My Kindle is a graveyard of self-improvement books, and I haven't self-improved much. But the lead author here is someone I've looked up to for decades, and wondered how he achieves so much with, apparently, so few digital tools. Nandan uses his phone, which has no email and no WhatsApp, mainly to make calls. Who does *that*, today? Yet I find he responds fairly quickly to email, and ends up achieving more in a day or month than most people I know of. And he uses and responds quickly to text messages. I don't know anyone else who uses SMS text.

While Nandan got a smartphone at age 55, his co-author Tanuj got it at 21 and is a heavy user—including of social media. The ideas and techniques they put forth in this book work for both users, and evidently for everyone in between. Many of the ideas and insights are things you already know—but might still find yourself saying, Oh. Yes. That's it, *that*'s the problem.

Our devices have all the apps we could ever need in every context: one click for email, Facebook, Twitter, any newspaper or magazine, all available at every moment. There's no separation of work from any other context. The lack of friction means that at every moment, the only thing stopping us from getting distracted is our willpower. Like carrying chocolates while on a diet. On the PC, it's the browser. Too many open tabs don't just slow down your computer: they "also act as a reminder of the tasks you need to get done, adding to your stress".

We're designed for really doing only one thing at a time, but our digital lives are designed around our phones' and computers' multitasking ability rather than our single-tasking nature.

And so I started with just a few of the authors' suggestions. Write it down, but scrap the to-do list, putting that instead into your calendar. Block a chunk of time, a fixed time each day if possible, in your calendar for your most important work, without even knowing what that work will be tomorrow or next week. "Time blocking is a stupidly simple method to make time for your goals." Take time to take notes after conversations and meetings, with simple ways to help you find them. Use just three top-level folders for all your files, auto-backing two of them to the cloud.

It's early days, but already I've managed to finish reading the book and squeezing in this review into my busiest week in more than a year, and done a lot more than I have in a long time: so I think some of this works. And I still think bitfulness sounds a bit silly. But this book isn't. It's a rare self-improvement book that seems to work. For keeping calm in the digital world is a really good thing. ■

Prasanto K Roy (@prasanto) is a public policy consultant and tech writer

ASSEMBLY POLLS 2022
COVER STORY

MODI + YOGI =

BJP'S NEW WINNING FORMULA

By RAJ CHENGAPPA

IF THERE WAS A TURNING POINT behind the historic back-to-back victories of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, it came late last year and under the most unusual of circumstances. In November 2021, just before the saffron party formally launched its campaign for the election to the state assembly, there were loud rumblings against Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath within the party. The word was that the mahant-turned-politician was arrogant and ran the state government pretty much as his own fiefdom without involving cabinet colleagues in decisions or accommodating the party's sensitivities. Some even called for a change of CM as had been done in neighbouring Uttarakhand as well as in Gujarat and distant Karnataka. It was at this point that Prime Minister Narendra Modi decided to step in and throw his weight decisively behind the saffron-clad monk.

THE TURNING POINT
PM Modi and CM Yogi at the Raj Bhavan in Lucknow, Nov. 21, 2021

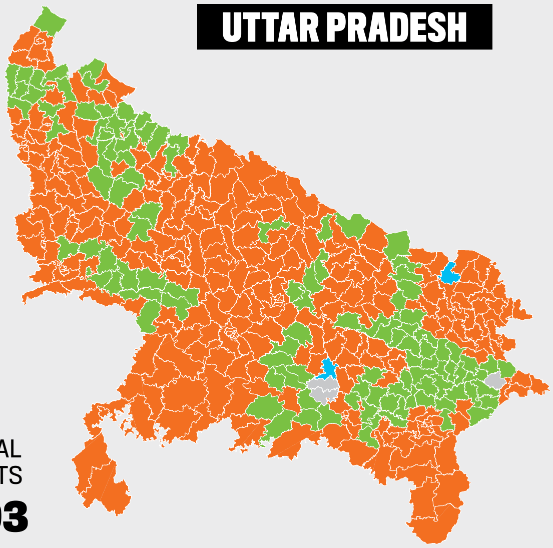
Few would claim to know Modi's mind or how it works. But the prime minister is said to arrive at decisions only after considering the feedback from key party colleagues and his own assessment of a situation. While Yogi had his shortcomings, he had also run UP with an iron hand, cracking down on big mafia gangs that earlier operated with impunity. This even earned him the moniker of 'Bulldozer Baba'. That many members of these gangs were Muslims cemented Yogi's image as a hardline Hindutva icon, one that he had assiduously projected. It included his strident campaign against so-called 'love jihad' or interfaith relationships. More importantly for Modi, Yogi had successfully implemented the score of welfare measures the PM had launched. Particularly the free rations scheme, which provided every card holder not just grains but pulses and cooking oil too to tide over the pandemic. With the 2024 election just two years away, a decisive win in Uttar Pradesh was critical for Modi and the BJP to bolster its chances for re-election.

And UP, which sends 80 legislators to the Lok Sabha, was a much coveted trophy. With his ascetic charisma and a firm style of governance, Yogi had helped the BJP repeat its sweep of the state in the 2019 Lok Sabha election, though with a slightly smaller tally than it had managed in 2014. He had a certain X factor too. Modi saw in him a kindred spirit, one who, like him, had devoted his life to a cause, had no *parivar* (family) to promote and was incorruptible in the public eye.

Last November then, on a visit to Lucknow to address a state police conference, Modi summoned Yogi to the state governor's residence where he was staying. There, in a carefully choreographed sequence, Modi was photographed strolling with Yogi, a paternal arm around his shoulder, apparently discussing matters of state. Then they posed together with Modi raising Yogi's hand in a manifest show of support. Soon after, the Prime Minister's Office reportedly told Yogi to tweet the photographs with the words, "We have embarked on a journey. We have dedicated everything and pledged to build a new India which will touch the heights beyond the sky with new light." In enacting this public endorsement, the prime minister sent out a categorical signal to the party that Yogi will not be replaced and that the chief minister and he will be the faces of the "double-engine sarkar" campaign for the UP assembly election. On the stumps, too, Modi on many occasions showered liberal praise on Yogi's governance, with some partymen saying it was more than what he said about other BJP chief ministers.

BJP STRIKE RATE

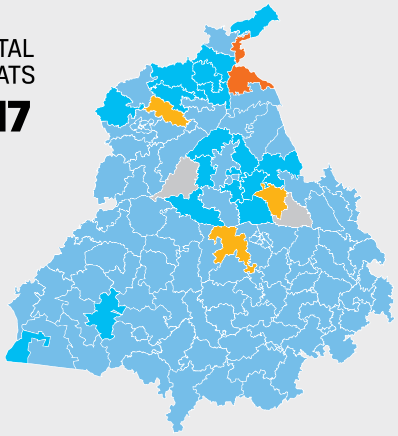
UTTAR PRADESH



TOTAL SEATS
403

	BJP+	SP+	CONG.	OTHERS
SEATS WON	273	125	2	3
VOTE SHARE	44%	36%	2%	18%

PUNJAB



TOTAL SEATS
117

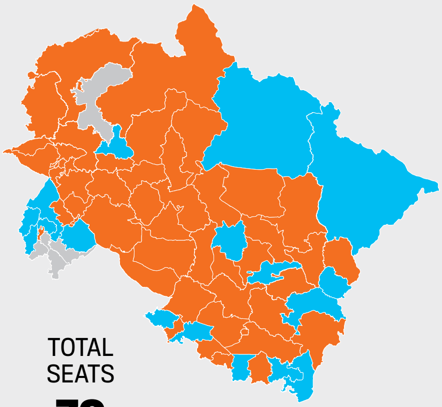
	AAP	CONG.	SAD	BJP	OTHERS
SEATS WON	92	18	3	2	2
VOTE SHARE	42%	23%	18%	7%	10%

Graphics by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY & ASIT ROY

SAFFRON HOLI
A victorious Yogi Adityanath at the BJP state headquarters in Lucknow, Mar. 10

ANI

UTTARAKHAND

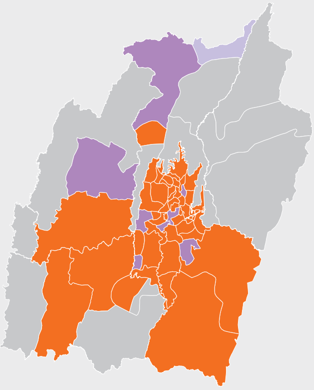


TOTAL SEATS
70

BJP	CONG.	OTHERS
47	19	4
44%	38%	18%

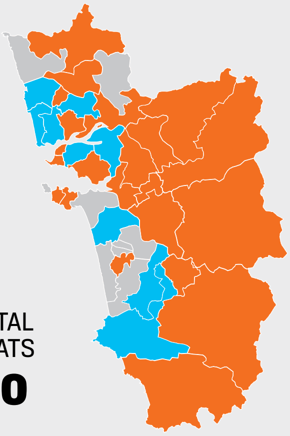
MANIPUR

TOTAL SEATS
60



BJP	NPP	CONG.
32	7	16
38%	17%	17%

GOA



TOTAL SEATS
40

BJP	CONG.	OTHERS
20	11	9
33%	23%	44%

BJP'S NEW FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

As the election results started pouring in on March 10, it soon became apparent that the Modi+Yogi combination had proved to be a highly successful formula for the BJP. The party secured a landslide majority, winning 255 seats on its own and 273 with allies out of the 403 seats in the assembly. That was historic: no chief minister in the state had ever won a re-election after completing a full term in office. Nor has any incumbent government been voted to power a second time since 1985. Though the BJP could not replicate its 2017 feat of winning 312 seats on its own (and 325 with allies), the victory was highly creditable as it came after two devastating years of the Covid-19 pandemic. Joblessness ran high, as did inflation, and the state's farmers were unhappy over the Centre's contentious agriculture laws.

There was also the spirited challenge from former chief minister Akhilesh Yadav, who not only managed to unite the Samajwadi Party but also built a successful campaign around the narrative that the BJP government had neglected the backward classes, which comprise nearly a third of the state's population. This is what enabled Akhilesh to lure three of Yogi's OBC ministers into the SP while also tying up with a handful of other parties representing these castes. Yet, as the India Today-Axis My India exit poll presciently predicted, the BJP swept the state, cutting across caste, gender and age groups, exposing a strong but silent pro-incumbency undercurrent that contributed to the huge saffron success (*see accompanying report*).

If the party has returned to power in four of the five states that went to the polls in this round, the secret, says Pradeep Gupta, CMD of the Axis My India agency, lay simply in 'Delivery'. "There is no way people will re-elect a party unless they believe it has performed," he says. "That's true for all the four BJP-ruled states, including UP, which returned the party to power. All had seen setbacks caused by the pandemic. But besides state-level development policies, it was the delivery of the various welfare schemes launched by the Modi government that proved decisive, whether in terms of quantity, quality or timelines."

RSS ideologue Ram Madhav acknowledges this as well. "What this round of polls proves is that the old politics of dynasty, religion and opportunistic alliances no longer cuts ice with the electorate," he says. "It is the beneficiaries of good governance that spoke up in these BJP-ruled states. It is a sign of the maturity of the Indian voter. It will put the onus on leaders to perform and deliver." In Punjab, voters seemed disillusioned with the performance of the incumbent Congress government, and voted overwhelmingly for the Aam Aadmi Party, giving it a stunning mandate of 92 seats in the 117-member House.

UP, UP AFTER UP?

For the BJP, the win in UP is crucial for several reasons. For one, as Modi himself said in his victory speech at the BJP headquarters in Delhi, "I hope pundits will now have the courage to say that the 2022 UP results have decided the 2024 Lok Sabha results." The accompanying wins in Goa, Uttarakhand and Manipur will ensure there are no hiccups for its nominee in the presidential election in July. The BJP and its allies will now have enough votes in the electoral college (a mix of elected representatives of both houses of Parliament besides elected members of state legislatures) to secure a win for its nominee.

The four-state victory is also expected to boost the BJP's confidence in the other states going to election. These include the Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh polls later this year, followed by assembly polls for Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Telangana, Chhattisgarh and the four northeastern states in 2023. The BJP plans to celebrate 100 years of the founding of the RSS, its ideological mentor, in 2025 in emphatic style, for which a win in the next general election is a must.

One significant outcome of the current round of assembly elections is that it has silenced critics who be-

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

IN YOGI, MODI SEES A KINDRED SPIRIT, WHO, LIKE HIM, IS DEVOTED TO A CAUSE, HAS NO FAMILY TO PROMOTE AND IS SEEN AS INCORRUPTIBLE

PORTRAIT OF JUBILATION
The top leadership with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the party headquarters in the national capital, Mar. 10

THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTION HAS SILENCED CRITICS WHO SAID BRAND MODI WAS ON THE WANE, ESPECIALLY AFTER THE BENGAL ROUT

lieved Brand Modi was on the decline, especially after the party's rout in the West Bengal assembly election last year. There is little doubt that the prime minister's towering presence, in addition to the formidable election machinery that Union home minister Amit Shah has put in place for the party, remained key factors in its current wins. However, the UP election has also brought Yogi into the spotlight, with the party allowing him unusual leeway during the campaign and even using the descriptor 'Yogi Sarkar' rather than invoking the BJP brand. Yogi was the prime campaigner in the state, undertaking as many as 300-odd solo rallies across the state, with both Modi and Shah joining in tactical spurts. Madhav says as much, "It is the Modi-Yogi combination that worked well in UP."

Yogi's elevation as chief minister in 2017, bypassing a whole range of contenders, is now clearly emerging as part of a larger BJP-RSS game plan to ensure a rapid expansion of the Hindu vote bank. Before he became chief minister, Yogi, a five-time MP, represented the extreme face of Hindutva and often criticised his counterparts in the Sangh Parivar—he is himself not of RSS stock—for pursuing a softer version of the Hindutva ideology. He was given the top post by Shah and Modi, in consultation with the RSS, because, as a monk, he could have a pan-caste appeal. Some of that came under strain with a perception of 'Thakurvaad'—Yogi is a Rajput originally from Garhwal—but eventually, he held up his end, running the rainbow coalition of castes that the BJP had put together and following the party high command diktats when it came to governing the state. These results now put Yogi squarely on the national stage and, some say, among the frontline contenders to succeed Modi.

That said, Modi remains head and shoulders above the rest of the phalanx of BJP leaders. As one of them puts it, "Modi occupies the No. 1 to 10 positions in terms of leadership. Any contender has to start at No. 11." Till recently, Amit Shah was seen as the logical successor to Modi. A relationship going back to their Gujarat days, Shah has been Modi's right-hand man, and someone whose organisational skills remain unmatched. Soon after his induction as home minister in 2019, Shah emerged as the hardline face of Hindutva, leading the coup to repeal Article 370, and bringing in the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) that disallowed Muslim refugees in India from applying for citizenship. Just as L.K. Advani was seen as the Hindu hardliner when A.B. Vajpayee was PM, Shah assumed that mantle in Modi's second term. Everyone agrees Shah remains and will continue to be a redoubtable force in the party, in addition to being the prime contender to succeed Modi.

Electoral strategists, however, do discern a gradual shift, with Yogi now emerging as one of Hindutva's key mascots whom the parivar will use to help consolidate and expand the Hindu vote bank across the country. Talking about the emergence of "a political Hindu", RSS and BJP ideologue Seshadri R. Chari says, "While, at a philosophical level, the RSS may push for an assertive Hindutva, at the practical level, it needs a political leader who can push for it aggressively. Yogi is emerging as that face. The new formula could be that Modi represents the softer face of Hindutva and pushes the development agenda, and Yogi is deployed to aggressively push for a consolidation of the Hindu vote bank across the country." Yogi has already assumed that mantle in the first term, campaigning for the BJP in many states and steadily building a pan-Indian presence—that process can only accelerate.

CAN YOGI DO A MODI?

Can Yogi rise from being an effective chief minister to prime minister as Modi had done? Gupta of Axis My India believes any political leader aspiring to repeat Modi's success needs to have three essential qualities that the prime minister possesses. The first is to have unquestioned acceptance in the party organisation and gain full control over it. The second is to have a vision for the country, and be able to get policies executed by the bureaucracy. This requires not just the bandwidth to comprehend the different areas of governance but also the management skills to get past the stubborn babudom. The third, and this Gupta believes to be a key attribute, is to develop a deep connect with the electorate, winning hearts both through words and actions. Rakesh Sinha, a BJP Rajya Sabha MP and strategist, says it unapologetically: "Modiji made the party a truly grassroots one and we are in power because of his charisma and vision. He ushered in a saffron revolution by creating a consensus between the Mandal vs Kamandal groups so that they are no more in conflict with each other. It is a new era in politics."

Many political observers believe that Yogi still has a long way to go before he can become a national leader in the Modi mould. Sudheendra Kulkarni, who served as advisors to both A.B. Vajpayee and L.K. Advani, doesn't think Yogi has what it takes to make it to the top. "I don't see him becoming a national leader because he lacks the main qualities that pushed Modi to the centre stage," he says. "Modi had a broader appeal among people outside of the Hindu vote. He propagated a Gujarat model of governance, which he popularised. Moreover, Yogi is nowhere near Modi in terms of being an effective communicator." Another party observer is as blunt. "Yogi won UP on the strength of Modi's charisma. Take Modi out of the equation, and you think Yogi can win even a simple majority in UP on his own? It is better he focuses on delivery for the state rather than nurture national ambitions."

Others see a limit to the process of consolidation of the Hindu vote bank, and therefore of pursuing an aggressive Hindutva agenda. Election strategist Prashant Kishor believes the BJP has never been able to consolidate the Hindu vote beyond 50 per cent of the total Hindu population in most elections (around 40 per cent of the total electorate). He touts Mamata Banerjee's decisive victory in West Bengal in the face of the BJP electoral juggernaut as proof of that. There is only that much electoral dividend religious polarisation can deliver. That is why Modi, the BJP and RSS have included nationalism and welfarism in the mix, along with playing the caste card where it suits them. Gupta, too, thinks there are limitations to the Hindutva vote and that it needs to be supplemented by a development and governance agenda. Yet others believe that the BJP has fulfilled most things the RSS was vociferous about after coming to power in 2014. This included abrogating Article 370, building the Ram Mandir and pushing for a uniform civil code. It now needs to find new ways of winning rather than just focusing on expanding the Hindu vote bank. "Welfarism, like providing toilets, water, housing and electricity, has been better at breaking caste and community barriers," says a party insider. "The emergence of the *laabharthi* (beneficiary) vote is proof of that, especially among women who voted in large numbers for the BJP in UP."

WITH HINDUTVA YIELDING DIMINISHING RETURNS, THE BJP IS BANKING ON NATIONALISM AND WELFARISM TO ATTRACT VOTES

What this points to is a way beyond religious consolidation. There is a whole new aspirational class of voters who want job opportunities, better incomes and good governance. The emphatic win of the Aam Aadmi Party in Punjab has equally demonstrated this. Arvind Kejriwal's *inquilab* (revolution) is all about empowering the common man. The Congress emerged as the biggest loser in this election, coming out poorly in all the five states it contested in. These included Uttarakhand and Goa, where it should have won, and Punjab, which it should have retained. The left-of-centre space that the party symbolises, and its push for inclusive growth, do still have traction, but the current leadership is incapable of using that strength to galvanise voters. AAP may be aspiring to occupy that space after its victory in Punjab, but it has a long way to go before it can displace the Congress as the BJP's primary challenger. Nor can the BJP afford to rest on its laurels. Modi has shown that only hard work, clarity and single-minded pursuit of goals will yield dividends. The ruling party must continue to focus on development and progress if it wants to remain one. ■

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ASSEMBLY POLLS 2022
UTTAR PRADESH

HOW UP WAS WON

THE BJP TOOK THE LEAD ON THE DEVELOPMENT AND LAW & ORDER NARRATIVE, AND USED SOCIAL SCHEMES TO OVERCOME CASTE DIVIDES

By PRASHANT SRIVASTAVA & ASHISH MISRA

Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH

F**OR SOMEONE COMMITTED** to renunciation as a way of life, it was, ironically, the promise of material benefit that has helped Yogi Adityanath return to power in Uttar Pradesh. Gleaming highways, an international airport, Ujjwala or Ujala, Saubhagya, Swachhata… the BJP's 'double-engine sarkar'—Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Centre, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in the state—it would seem, has delivered El Dorado to the electorate.

On March 10, the people of UP—whose status as India's most politically powerful bloc, controlling 80 Lok Sabha seats, is by now a well-worn cliché—rewarded the effort, handing the incumbent BJP government the distinction of being the first to be voted a second term since 1985 and Yogi Adityanath the honour of being the first chief minister in the state to return to power after serving a full five-year term. The BJP won 255 seats on its own in the 403-member legislative assembly, a comedown from the 312 seats it won

THE MONK WHO DROVE HIS CAMPAIGN
The victorious Yogi Adityanath acknowledges the adulation of the crowd in Lucknow

in 2017, but a clear majority nevertheless. The party also managed to increase its vote share—from 39.7 per cent in 2017 to 41.3 per cent this election. Together with the allies, the tally stood at 273, from 326 in 2017.

The overwhelmed Adityanath, drenched in the colours of a Holi come one week early, stood visibly humbled by the mandate. This was his win, a vote for his chief ministership. In 2017, that chief ministership had been bestowed on him; in 2022, he had earned it. The politics of caste and religion, he said while addressing party workers at the state BJP headquarters, had been well and truly buried, people had voted for development, nationalism and good governance. The bulldozer, an unflattering metaphor in any other circumstance, became the symbol of firm resolve in Yogi Adityanath's case, conveying the impression of corruption being razed to the ground.

That trend was reflected in the India Today-Axis My India exit poll: 22 per cent of the respondents said they voted for development, 8 per cent on law and order and 6 per cent for the free ration.

There was no dearth of factors that were thought capable of marring saffron chances: fears that the Jats had been alienated, thanks to the contentious farm laws that the central government first passed in September 2020 and then judiciously revoked in November 2021, or price rise, unemployment, the Samajwadi Party's Akhilesh Yadav drawing huge crowds at rallies, anti-incumbency against sitting MLAs, stray cattle. As it happened, all these turned out to be unfounded. The BJP cornered 47 per cent of the Jat vote, according to the exit poll, an increase of 4 percentage points over the previous election in 2017. Despite the farmers' agitation in western UP, almost half the Jat vote went to the BJP.

So much so that the BJP did not have to ride the Hindutva rath, despite delivering on its promise to build the Ram temple in Ayodhya. That credential is now taken for granted. Nor did it see the need for communal polarisation, despite the hijab controversy in Karnataka providing a timely opportunity for exploitation in poll-bound UP.

The BJP instead concentrated its energies on a new demographic—what it called the 'laabharthi varg' or the beneficiary class that has been the recipient of the government's social schemes. Beginning January 11, it started a Laabharthi Sampark Abhiyan, an outreach programme as part of which BJP workers visited the homes of the beneficiaries falling under the 125,000 booths in the state. There, they would apply sandalwood *tika* on the beneficiaries' foreheads and paste a sticker outside their door with the words '*Mera parivar, Bhajapa parivar*' (my family is the BJP family).

Those benefits included free rations under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana. A brainchild of the Union home minister Amit Shah, it is meant to ensure that some 150 million people in the state got 5 kg of rice or wheat, 1 kg pulses, 1 litre oil, salt and sugar twice a month for free against their ration card up to March 2022. An additional 3 kg of wheat and 2 kg of rice are being given under the National Food Security Scheme. The UP CM has said he intends continuing the scheme beyond March. The measure proved to be a master stroke, eating into Mayawati's Dalit vote bank and Akhilesh Yadav's overtures to the OBCs.

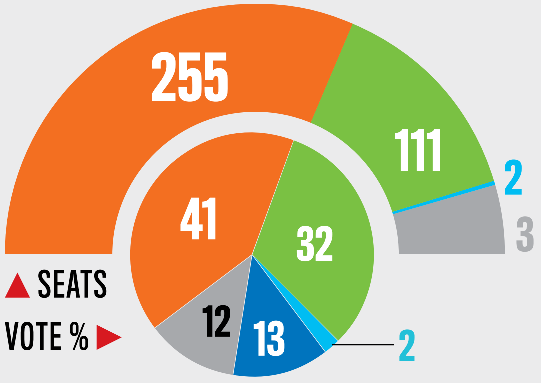
Likewise, the PM Kisan Nidhi and Ujjwala Yojanas benefit close to 39 million, or a fourth of the total voter base. Another 3.3 million people in UP are said to have availed of benefits under the PM Awas Yojana. The BJP claims that the universal coverage of these benefits helped it bridge caste and religious divisions and attract a consolidated vote. Women were another section schemes such as Ujjwala, free rations and toilets in every house targeted, helping the party earn their trust and vote. Prime Minister Narendra Modi calls them 'the silent voter' and attributed the NDA's win in Bihar in 2020 to them. More women voters seem to have backed the BJP than men—48 per cent as opposed to 44 per cent—going by the India Today-Axis My India exit poll. Female turnout also increased by 5 and 10 per cent respectively in the sixth and seventh phase of the election in UP, helping the BJP neutralise the advantage SP had acquired with caste-based alliances in these regions.

The BJP also led the narrative on how the law and order

A STAMP FOR YOGI

How UP voted in this assembly election

2022
Assembly results



TOTAL SEATS: **403**

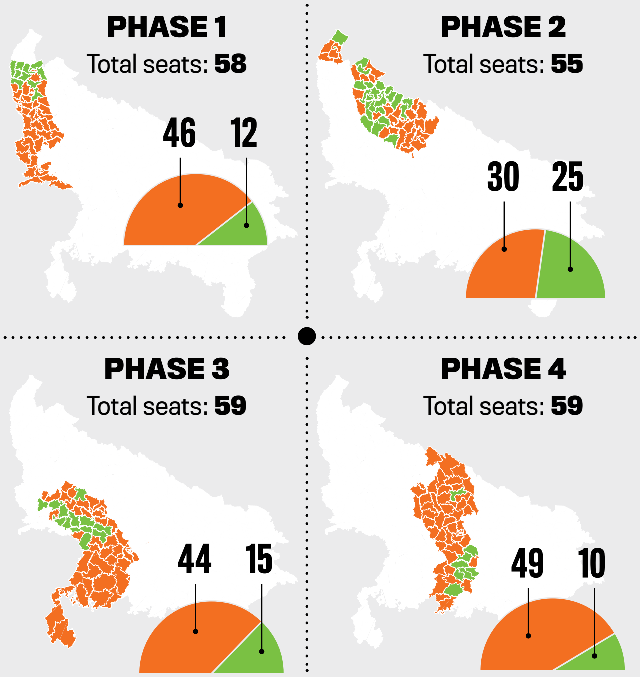
🟧 BJP 🟩 SP 🟦 Congress 🟦 BSP ⬜ Others

HOW UP VOTED IN 2022

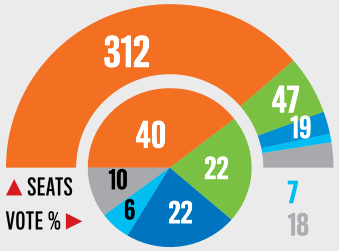
PHASE-WISE RESULTS

SEATS WON

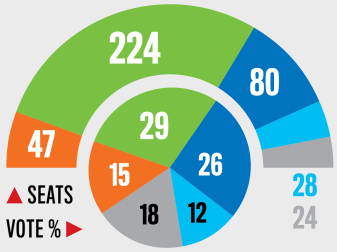
🟧 BJP+ 🟩 SP+ 🟦 Congress ⬜ Others



2017
Assembly results

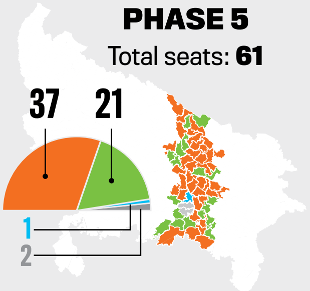


2012
Assembly results

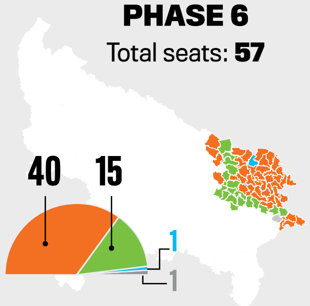


🟧 BJP 🟩 SP 🟦 Congress
🟦 BSP ⬜ Others

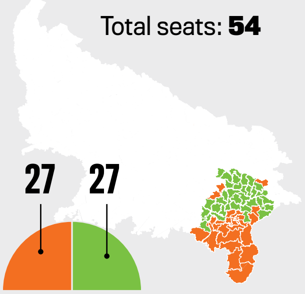
PHASE 5
Total seats: **61**



PHASE 6
Total seats: **57**

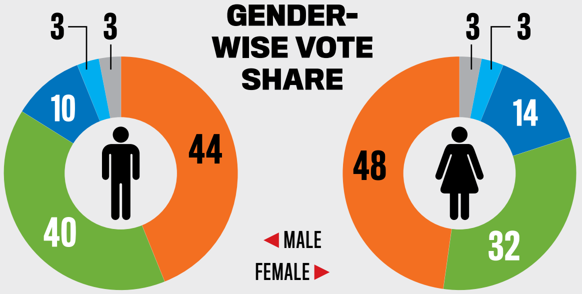


PHASE 7
Total seats: **54**

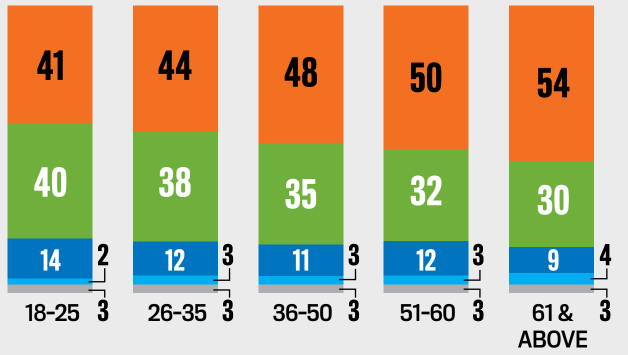


BREAK-UP OF VOTES

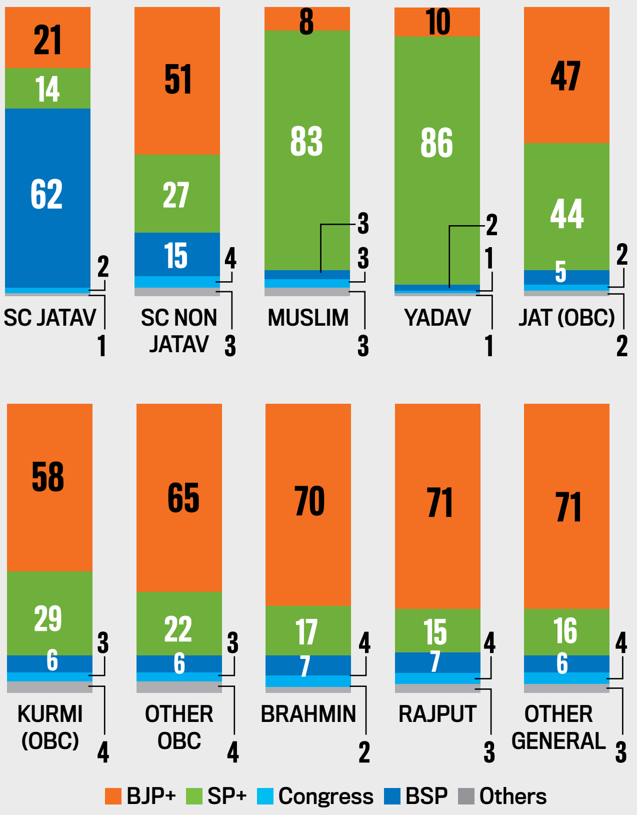
GENDER-WISE VOTE SHARE



AGE-WISE VOTE SHARE



CASTE-WISE VOTE SHARE



🟧 BJP+ 🟩 SP+ 🟦 Congress 🟦 BSP ⬜ Others

Source: India Today-Axis My India exit poll

WHY UP CHOSE TO RETAIN YOGI

1. The promise of a 'double-engine sarkar'–Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Centre, Yogi Adityanath in the state–seems to have found resonance among the people

2. The Yogi government was able to pitch its narrative of development, foreign investment and employment opportunity in the state

3. Likewise with law and order. Wearing the 'Bulldozer Baba' epithet proudly, the Yogi government was able to convincingly demonstrate that he has cracked down on criminal mafia groups and razed corruption to the ground

4. The BJP also undertook a massive beneficiary contact programme, under which its workers reached out to all the beneficiaries of the schemes of the central government, and reminded them how they were all part of the BJP family. They promised more would be in store if the BJP was voted to power again in UP

5. The dual charisma of PM Modi and CM Yogi also played a major role in appealing to public sentiment

SAMAJWADI PARTY

AKHILESH'S GOOD FIGHT

A YEAR OR TWO short of their 50th birthdays, both Yogi Adityanath and Akhilesh Yadav represent the younger generation of Indian politicians poised to inherit the mantle of their respective parties in the country. This round has gone to the 49-year-old Yogi Adityanath, giving him a second consecutive shot at chief ministership while denying Akhilesh a second stint. The Samajwadi Party scion appears to have been premature in his hope for his party's resurgence, but its electoral performance is not entirely a lost cause in the manner of the Congress and Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party seem to be after Election 2022.

The SP tally of 111 may have been significantly off the 202 mark needed for a majority in the 403-member Vidhan Sabha, but it did manage to deprive the BJP the added bombast of having gone '300 *ke paar*'. The saffron no doubt stole a march in the election, but by a significantly reduced majority from its 2017 tally—255 this time to 312 in the previous electoral outing. SP, on the other hand, saw an impressive improvement in its tally over 2017—adding 64 seats to the 47 seats it won last time. Its vote share has seen a tremendous jump of 10 percentage points, going up from 21.8 per cent in 2017 to 32.1 per cent this election.

Akhilesh's greatest achievement in Election 2022, however, was to have converted the contest into a bipolar one, tying up with smaller parties to give a good fight to the BJP. The loss now will give the party a chance to re-examine its strategy, to see where it went wrong, and to build on its strengths. Its performance will also enable it to function as a strong opposition in the state assembly. Says a senior SP functionary, on the condition of anonymity, "We may have missed a big opportunity to defeat the BJP, but we have to take a relook at our own weaknesses and the reason behind our loss in seats we were fully confident of winning. This election also gives us hope that the people's trust in the Samajwadi Party is on the rise and of Akhilesh Yadav emerging as the primary challenger for the BJP in UP."

While the SP may not have won enough seats in western UP, they did manage to sweep several districts. In Purvanchal, the party won all seats in Azamgarh district, which Akhilesh currently represents in Parliament. All of Ghazipur's seven seats went to SP too, as did the three seats in Kaushambi. The SP-Apna Dal (K) alliance candidate Pallavi Patel proved to be a giant killer, as she defeated outgoing deputy CM Keshav Prasad Maurya by 7,337 votes in Sirathu. In Ambedkar Nagar and Etawah as well, all the seats went the SP way.

SP's biggest disappointment came from western UP, where Jayant Chaudhary's Rashtriya Lok Dal managed to make its presence felt among the Jats and Muslims in the region, but could not convert it into votes. "*Jaaton ka saath nahin mila* (we didn't get Jat support)," rues an SP functionary. The RLD won only 8 out of 33 seats in which they fielded candidates.

Nor did the influx of non-Yadav OBC leaders such as Swami Prasad Maurya, Dharam Singh Saini and Dara Singh Chauhan pay any electoral dividends.

REACHING OUT Akhilesh receives a warm welcome from supporters in Rae Bareli

ANI

As Professor Kaviraj, who teaches political science at Lucknow University, points out, "Akhilesh should know by now that just by taking a few non-Yadav OBC leaders, you cannot expect the whole caste to vote for you. *Neta ka aana unki jaati ka saath aa jana nahin hota* (A politician's joining is no guarantee of his caste accompanying him)." Akhilesh also faltered by not bringing up issues concerning the Dalits—be it atrocities or reservations—in his speeches. The academic, though, does concede that there are lessons for Akhilesh in this defeat, and should he work on them, the future for him and his party may prove far brighter. ■

– Prashant Srivastava

situation in the state had undergone a sea change under the Yogi dispensation. The CM wore the 'Bulldozer Baba' epithet proudly, even as toy bulldozers flooded the market. "For the first time in an assembly election," says Prof. S.K. Dwivedi, the former HoD of the political science department at the Lucknow University, "a ruling party made strict action against criminals and improvement in the law and order situation election issues. Earlier, law and order in the state used to be the reason for the defeat of the ruling party."

Yogi had deployed Additional Director General of Police (ADG)-level officers in each zone of the state and Inspector General of Police (IG)-level officers in the range soon after he became chief minister in 2017. The 1987-batch IAS officer Avanish Awasthi was given the responsibility of bettering the law and order situation in the state; he was made principal secretary in the home department in 2019 and then the additional chief secretary in the same department. Listing the achievements during Yogi's tenure, Awasthi says, "The UP Police took swift action against 35 mafia and eight notorious criminals between January 2020 and December 2021, either confiscating their property worth Rs 1,128 crore or demolishing their illegal constructions." Awasthi also elaborates the 'crackdown' on criminals in the Yogi regime. "A list of notorious criminals was prepared in every district and a special police team formed to nab them," he says. "In the past five years, 137 criminals have been killed in encounters and 2,782 injured."

While such statistics these had led to accusations of encounter killings or the targeting of Muslims, it did not seem to matter to the electorate while casting their vote. Nor did other controversial aspects of Yogi's rule, it seems, be it the anti-Romeo squads, the anti-conversion law, the rape and killing in Hathras or the Lakhimpur Kheri incident. Caste and religion, Yogi Adityanath was at pains to point out in his victory speech, had ceased to be factors in elections. Yet, the 51 per cent non-Jatav vote that probably went to BJP, as per the exit poll, certainly made a difference to the tally. (Dalits form 22 per cent of the state's population. The Jatav vote remains firmly with Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party.) A rise of 20 percentage points from 2017, the fresh accrual of the non-Jatav vote would have resulted in a growth of almost 2 per cent in the overall vote share. Similarly with the non-Yadav OBC (Other Backward Class) vote. The BJP either held on to their support or increased it by as much as 5 per cent in some parts of the state.

Finally, the combined equity of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Yogi Adityanath seems to have convinced the voters to repose their faith in the BJP. Several candidates who faced anti-incumbency scraped through thanks to the power of the two. Home minister Amit Shah worked the magic elsewhere. Days ahead of the election, he held a door-to-door campaign in the politically crucial western UP. He also met several Jat leaders during the polls, to soothe any leftover ruffled sentiment over the farm laws.

The party's formidable electoral machinery did the rest. The central leadership descended on UP, holding *jan vishwas yatra*s, addressing public meetings and attending *nukkad sabha*s. With the Election Commission restricting physical rallies in the wake of the Omicron wave, the party ensured its virtual meetings could accommodate 50,000 people at a time.

Mostly, though, Election 2022 was a Yogi Adityanath show. Having now successfully demonstrated his electoral chops, there are whispers of him one day succeeding Narendra Modi to the country's top post. The win in UP has certainly pushed him a few rungs up in the top leadership ladder of the party. ■

IN SHORT

PUNJAB

› It was **only in 17 seats** that the AAP was not in the fight and the contest was limited to the traditional parties; **57 defectors** from the Akali Dal, BJP and Congress won on AAP tickets

› The Congress's famous **Majha brigade**—with Sukhjinder Randhawa, Tript Rajinder Singh Bajwa, Sukhbinder Sarkaria—who first rebelled against Capt. Amarinder Singh, **all managed to win their respective seats**

› **Parkash Singh Badal, 94, faced his worst defeat in seven decades.** He had last lost a poll in 1967, when he was defeated by Congress stalwart Harcharan Brar at Gidderbaha by 57 votes

UTTARAKHAND

› Education minister **Arvind Pandey won** his Gadarpur seat by 1,120 votes, breaking the long-standing jinx of sitting education ministers losing assembly polls

› With **CM Pushkar Singh Dhami's defeat** in Khatima, the tradition of Uttarakhand CMs losing elections continues. The last incumbent CM to get re-elected was B.S. Koshyari in 2002

– Anilesh S. Mahajan

ANI

UTTAR PRADESH

FIRST FAMILY OF RAMPUR KHAS

While the Congress is often derided for promoting dynastic politics, the Rampur Khas constituency in Uttar Pradesh is proof of the enduring power of political lineage. The party has not lost in this seat since 1980. Veteran Congress leader **Pramod Tiwari** won nine consecutive times from Rampur Khas. Now, his daughter **Aradhana Mishra** has registered her fourth consecutive victory here since 2012—there was a by-poll in 2014—in a grand display of the family's popularity in the region. Despite UP Congress in-charge **Priyanka Gandhi** fielding 40 per cent women candidates, Mishra was the only one who won.

–Kaushik Deka

MANIPUR

A SMOOTH MOVE

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

In Manipur, while the BJP returned to power on its own, the man having the biggest laugh is **Rajkumar Imo Singh**, son-in-law of CM N. Biren Singh. The former Congressman, who joined the BJP in October 2021, was instrumental in the defection of 15 Congress MLAs to the BJP over the past five years. Most of them have now been elected as BJP MLAs, while the Congress tally has plummeted to just five from 28 in 2017. The icing on the cake is that Imo Singh himself won from Sagolband for the third time in a row, a record in itself.

–Kaushik Deka

GOA

The Final Count

The BJP had been trying to win the Ponda seat in Goa for decades, to no avail. This time, it inducted **Ravi Naik**, the former Congress CM, in one last throw of the dice. On March 10, during counting, Naik seemed to be in third place after the MGP and Congress, but in the last round, things changed. Almost every alternate vote was in favour of the septuagenarian. When the results were announced Naik had lost just by one vote. A confident Naik sought a recount and was ultimately announced the winner by a margin of 13 votes. This is the first time that the BJP has won the Hindu dominated seat. Naik, the only Bhandari CM Goa has ever had, is now tipped to be selected Speaker of the assembly.

–Kiran D. Tare

देश का नं. 1
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जुड़े रहिए हर खबर से,
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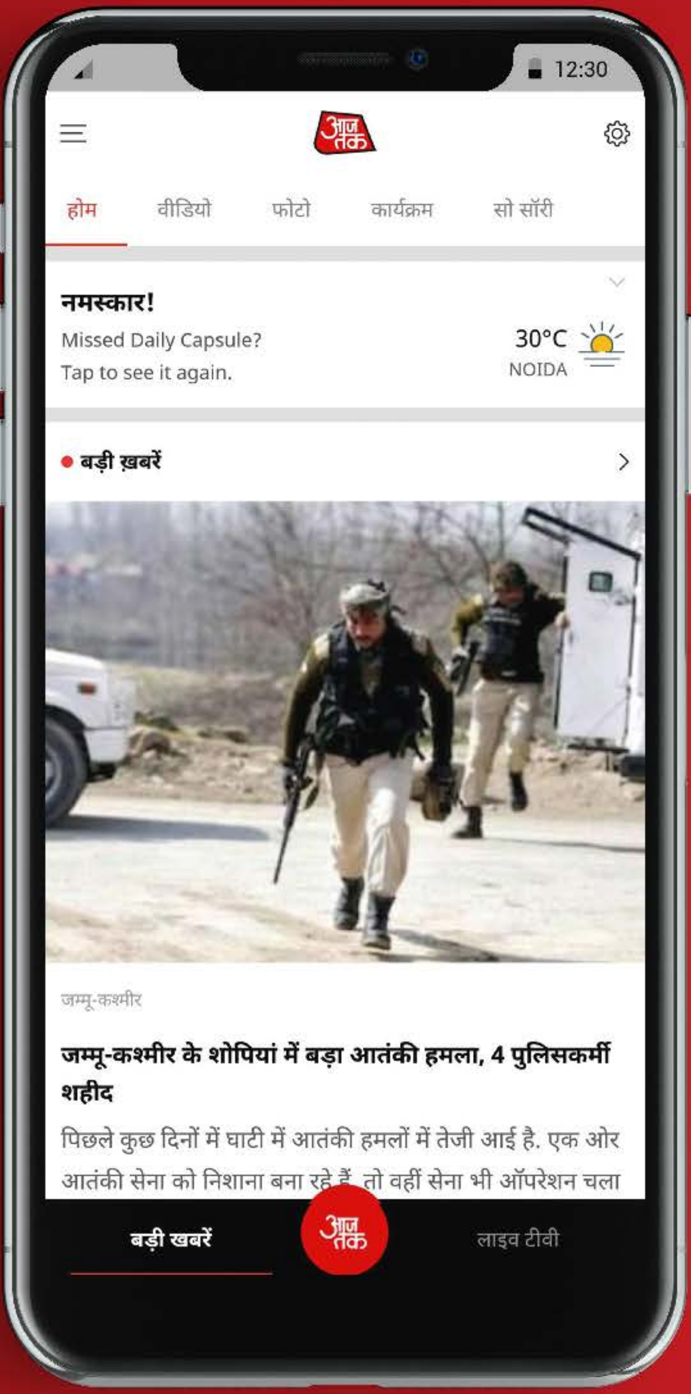
उपलब्ध है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नमस्कार!
Missed Daily Capsule?
Tap to see it again.

जम्मू-कश्मीर

जम्मू-कश्मीर के शोपियां में बड़ा आतंकी हमला, 4 पुलिसकर्मी शहीद

पिछले कुछ दिनों में घाटी में आतंकी हमलों में तेजी आई है. एक ओर आतंकी सेना को निशाना बना रहे हैं, तो वहीं सेना भी ऑपरेशन चला

ASSEMBLY POLLS 2022
PUNJAB

AAP AND A NEW DAWN

PUNJAB'S DISILLUSIONED VOTERS HAVE THROWN OUT THE OLD, AND ARE LOOKING FOR A CLEAN START WITH AAP. NEW CM BHAGWANT MANN HAS A BIG TASK ON HIS HANDS

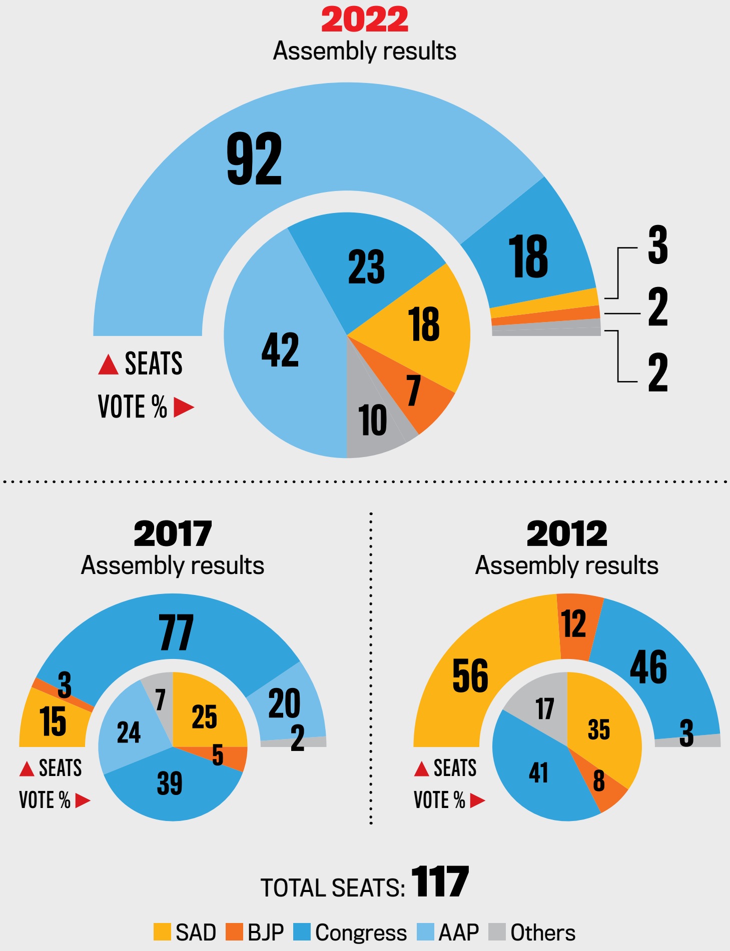
By ANILESH S. MAHAJAN

FORGING AHEAD Kejriwal and CM-in-waiting Bhagwant Mann at an election rally in Patiala

Photographs by ANI

SWEPT AWAY

The AAP's broom cleared all that was in its path

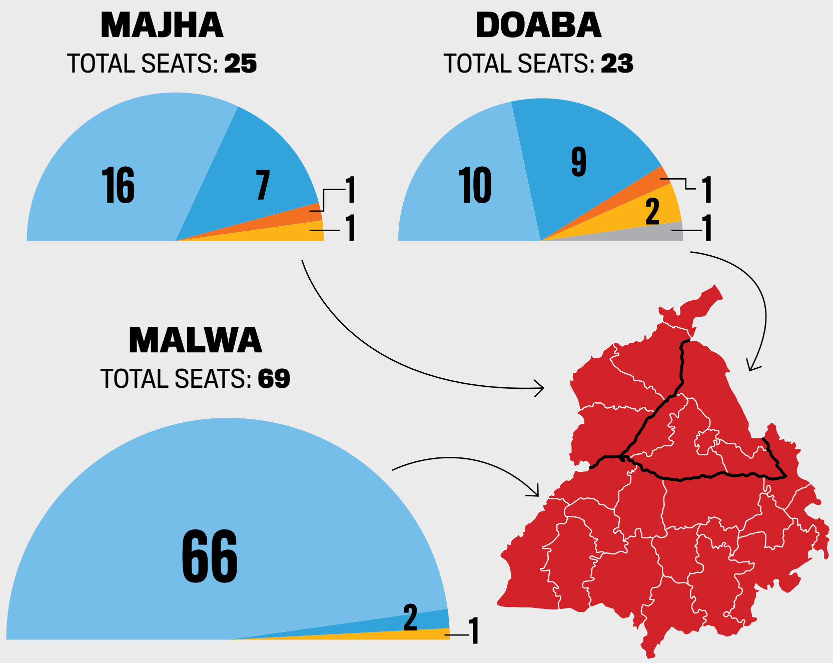


WITHIN THE FIRST HOUR of counting in Punjab, the sound of bursting firecrackers and jubilant *dhols* erupted in the otherwise sleepy town of Dhuri. Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) supporters wielding brooms—the party's election symbol—had reached the residence of Bhagwant Mann, their local candidate and AAP's chief ministerial face. By lunchtime, the celebrations had spread across the state as AAP headed for a historic landslide with 92 seats (42 per cent vote share).

Mann, a popular comedian-turned-politician in the mould of the Italian Beppe Grillo or Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky, has earned quite a cult following with his merciless broadsides against the political establishment. The Sangrur MP since 2014, Mann's wit-laced oratory has created its own niche in the Lok Sabha. And back home, those relentless barbs helped keep voters healthily sceptical of Punjab's two heavyweights, Parkash Singh Badal of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and Amarinder Singh (formerly Congress), and their parties. That gave voice to the voters' disenchantment with conventional parties.

This feeling left its mark in the

HOW PUNJAB VOTED IN 2022

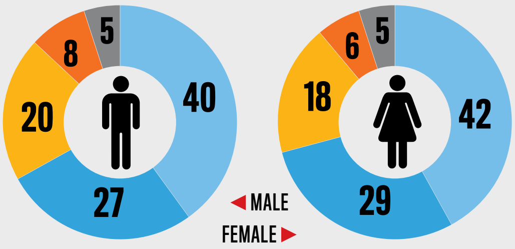


🟦 AAP
🟦 Congress
🟨 SAD
🟧 BJP
⬜ Others

BREAK-UP OF VOTES

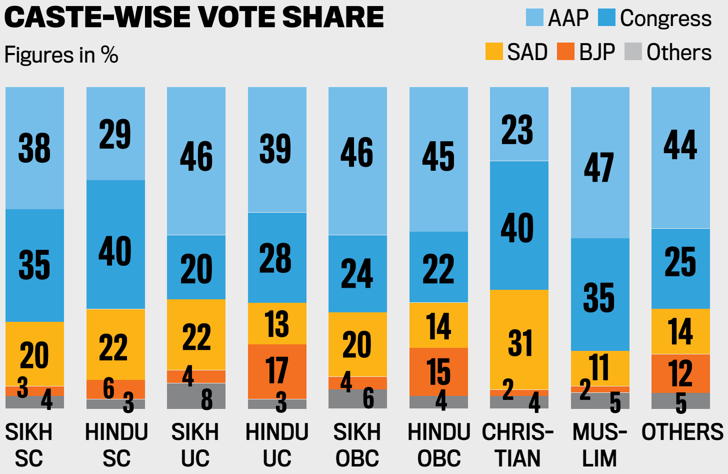
GENDER-WISE VOTE SHARE

Figures in %



CASTE-WISE VOTE SHARE

Figures in %



Source: India Today - Axis My India Exit poll

WHY PUNJAB WENT WITH AAP

1. Chaos created with the farm unions' protests did the BJP in while the way the Congress sacked CM Amarinder Singh also put off voters

2. There was massive anti-incumbency against the Congress regime, but the churn created by Navjot Sidhu and his constant war with new CM Channi and others destroyed whatever goodwill the party had left

3. A lack of confidence in the Akali Dal leadership and the popular perception that they were responsible for many of Punjab's past ills nixed their chances

4. AAP's consistent campaign since August 2021, the promise of a repeat of Kejriwal's Delhi model of good governance in Punjab, Bhagwant Mann's relatively clean image, it all helped in getting voters to push the button for the broom this time

FALLEN GIANTS Ex-CM Channi in Chamkaur Sahib (above); SAD's Sukhbir Badal

THE CONGRESS IS DOWN TO 18 SEATS, THE AKALI DAL TO THREE, A NEW LOW FOR BOTH PARTIES IN THE POST-MILITANCY ERA

elections as big names in Punjab's politics tasted dust. The list included, among others, sitting chief minister Charanjit Channi, who lost from both Chamkaur Sahib and Badhaur constituencies; Punjab Congress chief Navjot Sidhu, who lost in Amritsar East; Parkash Singh Badal, evicted from his traditional seat, Lambi; his son and SAD party chief Sukhbir Badal lost in Jalalabad; and finance minister Manpreet Badal was defeated in the Bathinda Rural seat. Capt. Amarinder Singh, the former chief minister, too lost in his Patiala stronghold. AAP candidates were the winners in all these places.

AAP benefited from the chaos in Punjab's politics generated after the Congress removed Amarinder in mid-September 2021. The lack of leadership led to party leaders squabbling among themselves, creating confusion among the voters. The Gandhi siblings, Priyanka and Rahul, the architects behind the change, did little to quell the confusion. By the time Channi was declared the party's CM face, just two weeks before the polls, the damage was already done.

Channi, the state's first Dalit chief minister, was banking heavily on his own Ramdasi/ Ravidasi community to back him. The community dominates the Doaba region of Punjab, which sends 23 legislators to the state assembly. In the event, the Congress managed to get just eight seats from this belt. The Dalit consolidation didn't happen, largely because of the massive infighting in the Congress and poor decision-making at the party headquarters in Delhi. In fact, the independent victor from Sultanpur Lodhi in the larger Doaba region, Rana Inder Pratap Singh, is the son of industrialist Rana Gurjit Singh, a cabinet minister in the Channi government.

In these polls, Congress was reduced to 18 seats from 80 in the previous assembly, melting the 38.5 per cent vote share in 2017 to less than 23 per cent now—a new low for the party in the post-militancy era. Their traditional rivals, the Akali Dal, continued to lose the confidence of the traditional *panthic* voters. The Badal family was burdened by the baggage of allegations related to incidents of sacrilege, drug smuggling and misuse of gurdwara finances—all of which they strongly deny. Meanwhile, their erstwhile ally, the BJP, continued to face voters' antipathy in the wake of the protracted farmers' protests. The outcome was the 100-year-old Akali Dal being reduced to three seats along with a lone seat for their ally BSP. With 18.4 per cent vote share, this is the worst performance ever for the *panthic* party.

The BJP did bag the Hindu-dominated Pathankot and Mukerian seats and maintained about 6 per cent of the vote share, but failed to win the confidence of even the core Hindu community elsewhere. Adding to the political churn in the run-up to the elections was a series of protests, ranging from teachers, anganwadi workers, contract workers etc., seeking regularisation of jobs.

All these circumstances helped AAP. And the anointment of Mann as the CM candidate allowed him to campaign freely in the state. Although a dedicated team from Delhi kept him sequestered from the media, the bigger message of "voting for broom" had already travelled to every nook and corner of the state, according to a top AAP leader in the state.

The stunning victory in the border state has, inevitably, unleashed the ambitions of party leaders for a larger national role for AAP. Raghav Chadha,

NON-STARTER Punjab Lok Congress chief Capt. Amarinder with wife Preneet Kaur at a road show in Patiala

ਹਾਕੀ ਅਤੇ ਗੇਂਦ ਦਾ ਬਟਨ ਦਬਾਓ

the party's in-charge for elections in Punjab, says, "There is no doubt that today's results have made the AAP the fastest growing political party ever in the history of Indian politics. Today, we are a national party, a force to reckon with nationally. No other party has achieved this status. It is not for the AAP to decide whether to fight Gujarat, Himachal, it is for the people of those states to decide whether they want AAP in their state or not." AAP can now send five members to the Rajya Sabha from Punjab when elections to the Upper House are held later this summer.

AAP has already spread its wings in Chandigarh, getting 14 members elected to the local corporation in a 35-member house. Similarly, two partymen got elected in Goa. But for their soaring ambitions to take flight, Mann will have to perform. With a full government in Punjab, AAP can now work to make an example of their governance model, and launch Kejriwal as a national leader. In his address to a public gathering in Delhi on results day (March 10), Kejriwal invoked the words of freedom fighter Bhagat Singh: "Nothing changes if the system doesn't change...." Mann will have to become that change.

WITH A FULL GOVERNMENT IN PUNJAB, AAP WILL HOPE TO MAKE AN EXAMPLE OF THEIR GOVERNANCE MODEL AND LAUNCH KEJRIWAL AS A NATIONAL LEADER

With Punjab's cumulative debt almost touching Rs 2.82 lakh crore, Mann faces serious challenges. In the past five years, Punjab added debt of Rs 1 lakh crore. Adding to Mann's worries, from June onwards, the Centre is not obliged to provide GST compensation. The state is still falling short of the targeted revenues from GST by 20-odd per cent. Mann's critics point to his lack of administrative experience in the face of such serious issues.

Unlike Kejriwal in Delhi, Mann will also not have the luxury of a surplus budget. Apart from encouraging crop diversification to address the state's agricultural crisis, he will have to find the means to incentivise industries in Punjab. The recent farm unions' protests have already discouraged private investors from betting big on Punjab; Mann will have to look for ways to popularise crop diversification with public money.

But his biggest challenge will be to strike a balance among the politically dominant Jat Sikhs, Dalits and upper-caste Hindus, while making sure that a perception is not created that he is being tutored by the party high command in Delhi. For this, he can take cues from Amarinder, who despite being a Congress CM, ran Punjab like a regional outfit. He differed with the high command on various issues like construction of the Sutlej-Yamuna link canal, free power to the farmers etc. Similarly, Mann too may have to confront Kejriwal's Delhi government on issues such as stubble burning and water sharing.

Along with this, Mann will have to tread lightly on *panthic* issues. The near wipeout of the Akali Dal has opened doors for AAP in the Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and Sikh politics to further marginalise Sukhbir Badal. This is the first time since Operation Blue Star that SAD is almost out of state politics and the Congress too is weak. Meanwhile, on the national security front, pro-Khalistan groups including the Simranjit Mann-led Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) garnered some 5 per cent of the vote. While dealing with them democratically, Mann will have to reassure Hindu voters who took a chance on AAP.

Law and order issues, the smuggling of arms across the border, inter-state disputes of irrigation and dams, and the transfer of the Union territory of Chandigarh to Punjab are among the standing crop of challenges that will test the new chief minister as he takes charge of the state that was once India's showpiece of rural prosperity and progress. A perilous task and an unprecedented opportunity for Mann and his party. ■

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A GAMBLE THAT PAID OFF

WHILE A FRAGMENTED OPPOSITION FAILED TO CAPITALISE ON ANTI-INCUMBENCY, THE BJP FIELDED A RAFT OF DEFECTORS AND WON

By KIRAN D. TARE

MILIND SHELTE

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NEWS

VICTORY PARADE Pramod Sawant greets his supporters outside the BJP office in Panaji, Goa, after his win (March 11, 2022)

ON MARCH 10, WHEN THE counting of ballots began at 8am at the government polytechnic in Altinho in Panaji, Goa, the mood was somber. Just two hours later, though, the atmosphere had turned jubilant as BJP workers garlanded a victorious Vishwajit Rane and hoisted him on their shoulders to chants of "CM Vishwajit Rane *yancha vijay aso* (cheers to CM Vishwajit Rane)". The health minister in the Pramod Sawant government could barely conceal his grin, but was humble in his response. "I have no ambition to become the chief minister. I will abide by the decision taken by my party leaders," he told reporters.

The BJP office turned celebratory once again after the news of Sawant's victory came in. The workers cheered: "Pramod Sawant once more". And though the CM's victory margin was 756, his thinnest so far over the past three elections, it diminished Rane's chances of landing the top post.

The support for Rane, though, is a sign of the new BJP in Goa. The Ranes of Sattari, erstwhile royals, had traditionally been Congress loyalists, but Vishwajit Rane, son of six-time CM Pratapsingh Rane, chose to throw in his lot with the winning side after the election results were announced in March 2017. He was rewarded with a cabinet post while retaining Valpoi, a Rane stronghold.

The BJP's gamble of fielding 33 defectors seems to have paid off in thwarting anti-incumbency. The Sawant government had been facing a lot of dissent over allegations of corruption during the pandemic, attempts to turn the state into a coal transportation hub and disregard for the environment, among other things. It was the defectors, mostly local strongmen, who managed to retain their traditional vote bank and helped the BJP win 20 of the state's 40 seats, one short of the majority mark of 21.

For one, the BJP managed to retain its north Goa stronghold, winning 11 of the region's 20 seats. The OBC (other backward classes) voters, who have traditionally supported the BJP, came to the party's rescue again. The BJP's win is also impressive given that one of its more influential leaders, Michael Lobo, had joined the Congress just days before the poll and used his influence and financial clout to campaign extensively against his former party. Lobo managed to damage the BJP's prospects in Calangute, Saligao and Siolim, but could not wipe them out in north Goa as he had vowed to do. The BJP's decision to induct independent MLA Rohan Khaunte and GFP (Goa Forward Party) MLA Jayesh Salgaonkar also helped negate Lobo's influence. Similarly, the BJP-engineered coup within the Rane family helped it conquer the Congress stronghold of Poriem. Vishwajit Rane's wife Deviya was persuaded to contest the seat on a BJP ticket, delivering the constituency that her father-in-law had nurtured for over 50 years. The senior Rane, a Congressman, did not contest the election to avoid a feud in the family.

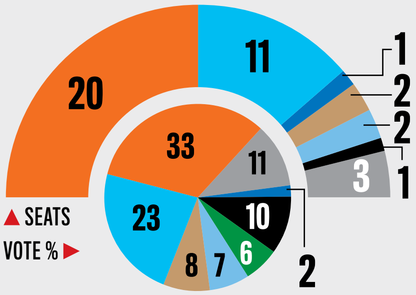
That outsiders will form the core of the BJP in the future was evident even in Atanasio Monserrate's victory in Panaji, where he was pitted against Manohar Parrikar's son Utpal. Monserrate managed to upend the Parrikar legacy only three years after the BJP stalwart's death in March 2019. True to his nature, though, he refused to acknowledge that the BJP had anything to do with his and his wife Jennifer's wins. "The BJP workers did not work for us," he told INDIA TODAY. "We have won because of our people." Monserrate, however, has said he would remain in the BJP till his last breath. A criminal case against him pertaining to a 2008 attack on a Panaji police station could be the driving force behind this loyalty.

THE SAFFRON HOLD

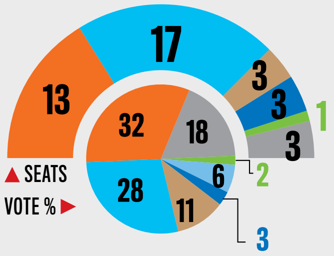
How the state voted in the past three elections

TOTAL SEATS: **40**

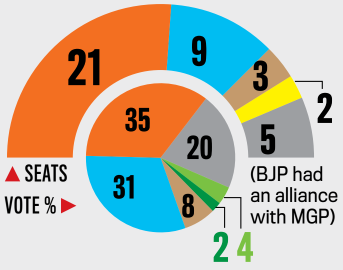
2022
Assembly result



2017
Assembly result



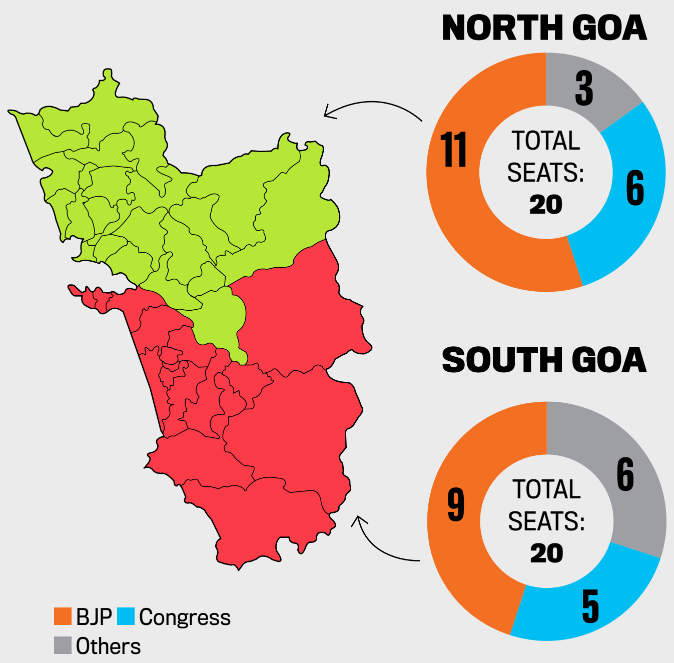
2012
Assembly result



🟧 BJP 🟦 Congress 🟫 MGP 🟦 GFP
🟩 TMC 🟩 NCP 🟦 AAP ⬛ RGP 🟨 Goa Vikas Party ⬜ Others

The BJP also performed impressively in its 'weak' region—south Goa. It won nine of its 20 seats, its highest tally in the region since 2012, despite dissent among Catholic voters and the BJP's poor organ-

HOW GOA VOTED IN 2022



WHY GOA CHOSE THE BJP OVER CONGRESS

1. With a thrust on infrastructure development and social welfare, the BJP had a better track record in the state than Congress. The BJP's monthly 16,000 litre free water scheme has been a hit

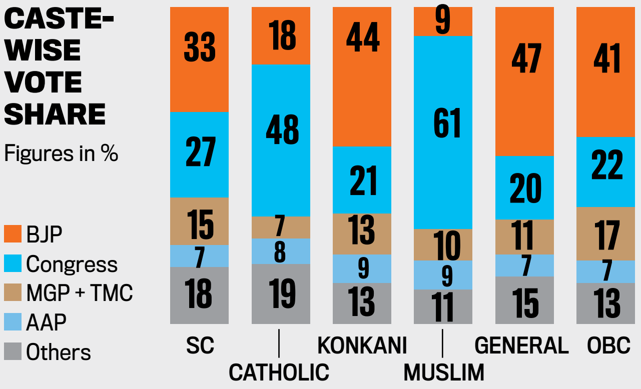
2. The BJP's assertion, that the same-party rule at the Centre as well as in the state will help Goa get more funds, worked

3. The BJP worked as a team irrespective of the team members' lineage in the party, while the Congress seemed divided

BREAK-UP OF VOTES

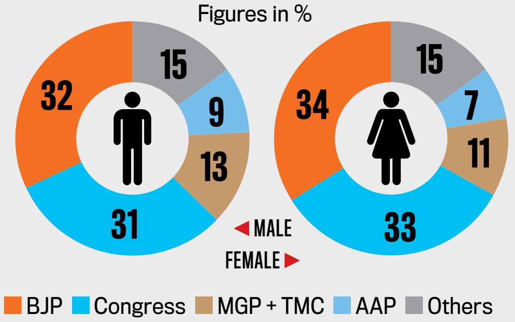
CASTE-WISE VOTE SHARE

Figures in %



GENDER-WISE VOTE SHARE

Figures in %



Source: India Today - Axis My India Exit poll

isational network.

During its campaign, the party took care to highlight its work towards developing the state's infrastructure and the vast network of roads it built during its 10-year rule, but the government's poor handling of the pandemic and allegations of corruption dulled the shine of its achievements and, perhaps, contributed to its failure to secure a clean sweep. A senior BJP leader, though, attributed it to the voters' high expectations. "If you give someone Rs 50 when they are actually entitled to Rs 25, they'll expect Rs 100 the next time," he says. "We tried to give as much as we can, but the people wanted more from us."

As for the Congress, even though it fell significantly short of securing the majority, the party did manage to win 12 seats along with ally GFP. A fresh approach, wise selection of candidates and targeted campaign helped it overcome its depleted numbers in the past five years—mass defections had reduced the party's strength to two from 17. The party suffered its biggest jolt in its bastion south Goa. It won only five of the 20 seats there, when it was hoping to get almost 84 per cent of the Catholic votes despite the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) and Trinamool Congress' (TMC) attempts to woo them. The AAP and one independent managed to dent the Congress's vote bank there, helping the BJP.

Simultaneously, the Congress campaigned actively against the 10

MLAs who had defected to the BJP in 2019. It found alternative candidates in their respective seats and took utmost care that no defector who wanted to return, like Filipe Nery Rodrigues and Aleixo Reginaldo Lourenco, was fielded. If the Congress has failed to snatch power from the BJP, it is largely because of the lack of a credible leader. It relied on Lobo to damage the BJP, but the move backfired.

Among the survivors, the Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party (MGP) deserves special mention. The party lost two of its three MLAs to the BJP and was in danger of being wiped out in the state. Instead, the Hindutva-oriented party managed to win two seats despite its alliance with the "anti-Hindu" TMC. The MGP has announced its unconditional support to the BJP, hoping for a better deal. An analysis of the results shows that the party cornered the votes of the upper-caste Hindus, its traditional supporters, despite joining hands with the TMC, which is locally perceived as anti-Hindu. Newcomer Revolutionary Goans Party (RGP), which secured 10 per cent votes, ended up helping the BJP in dividing opposition votes, says MGP leader Sudin Dhavalikar.

After a wait of five years, the AAP, with a win in two seats, opened its account in Goa. It sees its victory in Benaulim and Velim as a mandate for clean slate candidates and its growing influence among Catholics. The TMC, however, failed to make an impression.

Sawant has announced that three independents—Chandrakant Shetye, Lourenco and Antonio Vaz—have pledged unconditional support to the BJP. He fell short of his target of 22 seats, but Sawant has become the second leader after the late Manohar Parrikar to secure a majority for the BJP. Sulakshana Sawant, the BJP women's wing state president and the CM's wife, said: "Our victory is a tribute to Manoharbhai Parrikar. I hope the CM [Pramod] will walk on the path laid by him."

The next challenge before Sawant is portfolio allocation. The ambitious Rane has got a shot in the arm with two seats within the Rane family. Sawant's future moves are likely to be in accordance with those of Rane's. ■

#BeTheBetterGuy
A Road Safety Initiative

HYUNDAI | Moving the world Together | A CSR initiative by Hyundai Motor India Foundation × INDIA TODAY GROUP

DON'T USE MOBILE PHONE WHILE DRIVING

With the advent of mobile phones, life has really changed. People are getting connected with one another thanks to them but there is still some harm in using them when you must focus on something else at hand.

When you drive, it is important to pay attention and focus on the road ahead. If your senses are focused elsewhere (in this case: on using your phone), then there can be disastrous consequences for not only you, but also for other drivers around you.

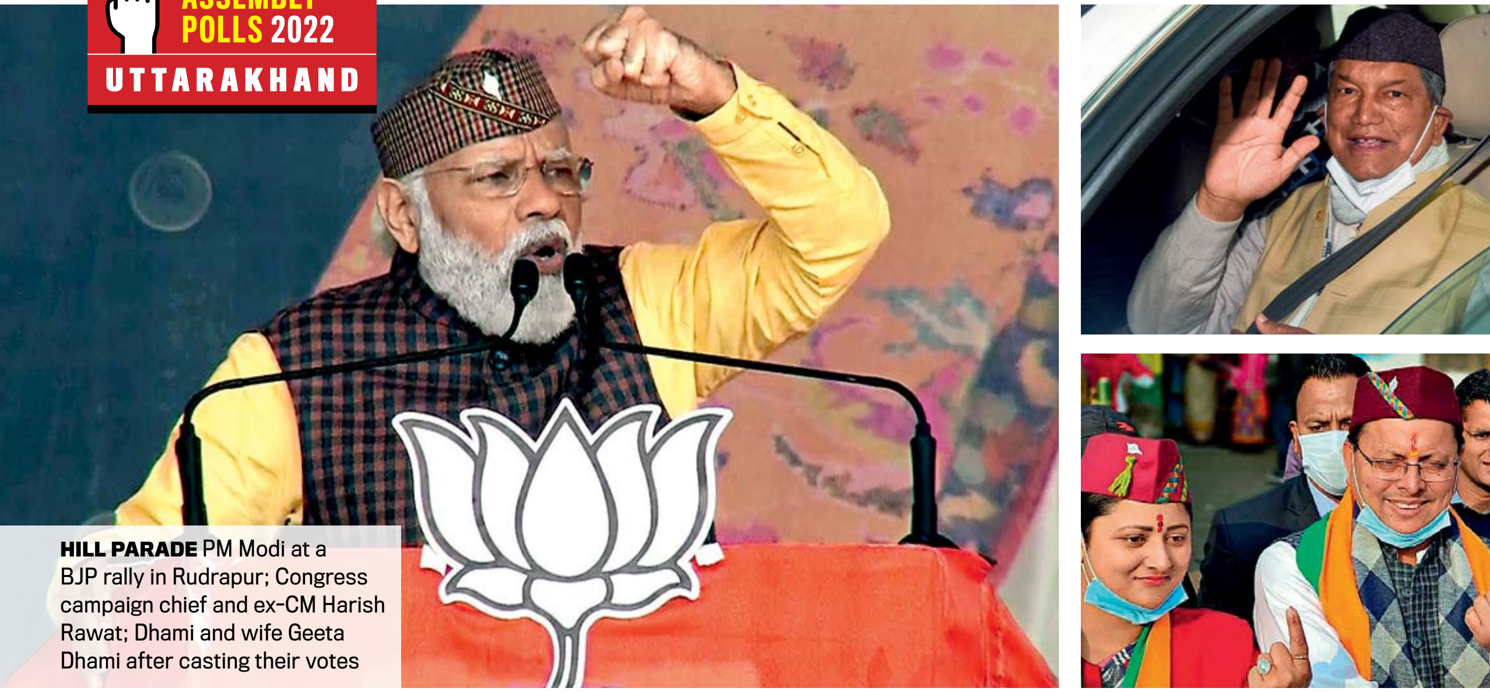
The risks associated with using your phone or texting while driving have been publicized time and again. Numerous accidents have occurred solely because people were distracted by their gadgets.

Now we understand that staying in touch is important, but there's a safe way for you to be connected. Most modern cars, including Hyundai cars, come with sophisticated Bluetooth enabled infotainment systems so you can communicate wirelessly through your mobile phone.

While texting on the move is definitely not recommended, voice commands can be used to make phone calls. Most Hyundai cars are also equipped with steering mounted controls to receive or reject calls while driving. This is a great way to stay connected and drive safety too. However, we still recommend that you keep the calls short so that you're not distracted and your focus is entirely on the road.

Even motorcyclists can safety have phone conversations with innovative Bluetooth devices that can be mounted on helmets. Using Bluetooth, these devices seamlessly connect to the mobile phone and allow bikers to answer or decline phone calls while on the go. No modifications are needed to install these devices.

Needless to say, today's technology provides you with a plethora of safety measures. So, use them and invest in them as they are truly life savers.



HILL PARADE PM Modi at a BJP rally in Rudrapur; Congress campaign chief and ex-CM Harish Rawat; Dhami and wife Geeta Dhami after casting their votes

A CHANCE TO MAKE AMENDS

CONGRESS INFIGHTING MADE THE JOB EASY FOR THE INCUMBENT BJP EVEN AS CM DHAMI FELL SHORT OF THE CREASE

By ANILESH S. MAHAJAN

AS DUSK FELL IN the hill state of Uttarakhand on March 10, a wave of jubilation swept through the BJP. The party had scored a second successive victory with 47 seats in the 70-member state assembly. The BJP's tally is down from 57 in 2017 and so is its vote share (46.5 per cent to 43.5 per cent), yet managing a repeat government in what has been a 'swing state' electorally is no mean feat.

The good fortune, though, did not extend to Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, who lost his Khatima seat by 7,273 votes to old rival Bhuwan Chandra Kapri (Congress). Call it tradition, but the last incumbent CM to get re-elected to the Uttarakhand assembly was B.S. Koshyari in 2002. In fact, no one, except the late N.D. Tiwari of the Congress, has even completed a full term in office. In the previous two assembly polls, the incumbent chief ministers faced particularly ignominious defeats. "The BJP is forming a government with a massive majority. I'm thankful to the party and central leadership for giving an opportunity to workers like me, who come from remote villages and humble backgrounds," Dhami told INDIA TODAY, summing up his efforts.

In July last year, Dhami was picked up as night watchman to end a dizzying bout of CM roulette—the BJP central leadership had dumped Trivendra Singh Rawat and then Tirath Singh Rawat within four months. The BJP must now consider its options for the next chief minister of the state. The names of Rajya Sabha MP Anil Baluni, as well as RSS old-timer Dhan Singh Rawat, who won the Srinagar seat by 587 votes, and godman-turned-*neta* Satpal Maharaj, who won Chaubattakhal by over 10,000 votes, are doing the rounds.

"We were certain that the people will vote for change. There has been some shortfall in our efforts. I take responsibility for this defeat," said the Congress's Harish Rawat, who had led the party's campaign. The former CM himself lost

Photographs ANI

from Lalkuan by 17,527 votes to the BJP's Mohan Bisht. The Congress, which initially seemed well-placed for a return to power, proved to be more adept in the art of fratricide. Lalkuan was just one of the 29 seats where the Congress faced rebels. Perhaps the party leadership was distracted by the unfounded near-certainty that the BJP couldn't stave off anti-incumbency.

This time, the open fight among Congress leaders allowed the BJP the time to not only regroup but also to trumpet the familiar tropes of Hindutva, development and nationalism. The party also managed to hardsell PM Narendra Modi's emotional connection with the 'Char Dham', despite campaign restrictions that limited him to only three physical rallies—at Srinagar, Almora and Rudrapur.

The PM's iconic stature among the Hindutva ranks also helped smooth over internal disputes in the party. Trivendra Rawat had prised open a fault-line during his stint as chief minister by mooting legislation to hand administrative control of the Char Dham—Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri—besides 49 other temples to a Devasthanam Management Board. The protests started with local temple priests, spread to the VHP (Vishva Hindu Parishad) and Trivendra's old buddies in the RSS, and inevitably reached the state assembly. The Dhami regime too had to risk the wrath of the Hindutva hardliners when, on instructions from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), he finally cracked down on the hate speech of Yati Narsinghanand Saraswati and his cohorts at the Haridwar Dharam Sansad.

However, the BJP campaign did not shy away from Hindutva sentiments and hypernationalism. The party also referenced the late chief of defence staff Bipin Rawat (who died in a helicopter crash on December 8 last year), national security and the importance of the forces. This seems to have addressed the two hot-button topics in the hill state—army welfare (Uttarakhand is a major recruitment zone) and religious tourism at the Char Dham, a mainstay of the state economy. Meanwhile, the BJP stoked communal prejudices by playing up a video of Congress leader Aqeel Ahmed quoting a commitment by Harish Rawat to set up a 'Muslim University'. Muslims make up about 14 per cent of the state's electorate and are largely concentrated in Haridwar district. The BJP got just three of the 11 assembly seats in the district.

The BSP commands some influence in Haridwar district and the Dalit-Muslim combination had won 7 per cent of the total votes in 2017, mostly in Haridwar, though without any seat to show for it. This time, their candidates won Laksar and Manglur seats.

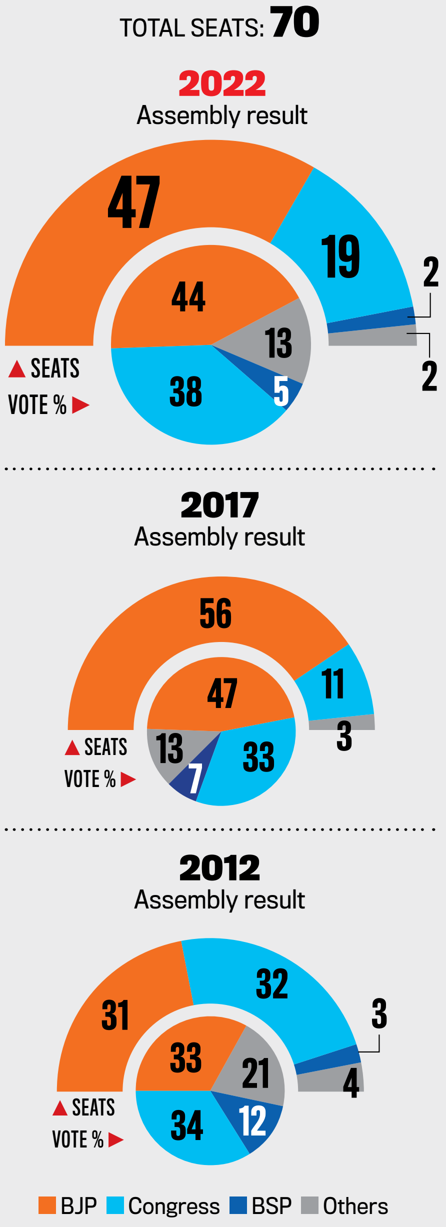
There is another perennial faultline in Uttarakhand: the historic divide between the two hill divisions of Garhwal and Kumaon. Here too, Trivendra, as CM, had stirred a controversy by notifying Gairsain as a third hill division, with districts from both Garhwal and Kumaon. It meant the latter would have had to cede even its cultural capital, Almora. In the end, along with his ill-fated temple bill, this ensured he was practically escorted out of office with black flags.

Before going to the polls, Dhami, who is from the Kumaon, ensured that he got the prime minister himself to lay the foundation stones for 23 projects worth over Rs 17,500 crore in the state. On the anvil are multiple road-widening projects, a hydropower project in Dhami's own district of Pithoragarh, and a sewerage network upgrade in Nainital. While sounding productive, all this remains work in progress and will take time to bear fruit in terms of creating jobs.

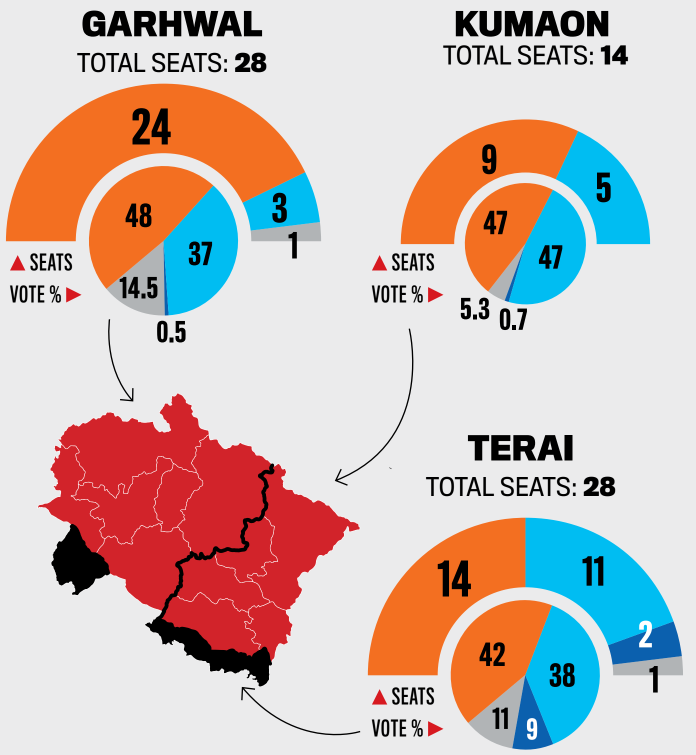
Many of the younger voters were understandably worried about the economy and their seemingly vanishing job prospects. The incumbent CM's problem was that he had nothing much to show except promises. So he added a personal touch and tried to project himself as the head of a youth-oriented government. The narrative suited the BJP: the Congress's CM aspirant, Harish Rawat, is 73; the next in line, Pritam Singh, is 63. Uttarakhand's 7.9 million electorate had around 1.2 million new voters. Just months after Dhami took over last year, National Statistics Office (NSO) data

A SECOND WIND

How Uttarakhand voted in the past three elections



HOW UTTARAKHAND VOTED IN 2022



WHY THEY VOTED FOR THE BJP

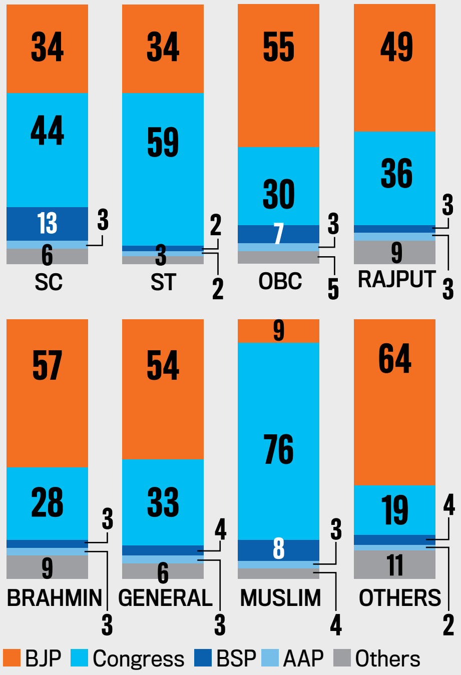
1. PM Modi's brand and the appeal for Hindutva still go a long way in the hill state. His reputation as a doer and the 'double engine' track the BJP plays still gets traction

2. The massive infighting in the Congress put off voters. Septuagenarian Harish Rawat, who was finally given charge of the party campaign after much drama, could not even get his seat of choice and had little say in candidate selection

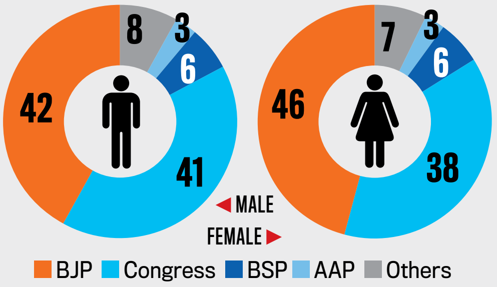
3. Though he lost the polls himself, CM Pushkar Dhami had the image of being a doer and, being young, was popular among the youth

BREAK-UP OF VOTES

CASTE-WISE VOTE SHARE



GENDER-WISE VOTE SHARE



(Figures in %)

Source: India Today-Axis My India Exit poll

for October-December 2020 showed that 27 per cent of those in the 15-29 age group in Uttarakhand were jobless (national average was 25 per cent). The graph had peaked at 38 per cent during the lockdowns, and never receded to the pre-Covid level of 21 per cent.

Adding to the pressure, some 500,000 natives migrated back to the state during the pandemic. Worst of all, neither regular industry in the state's south nor the tourism segment in the hills has recovered from the massive hit they took. The India Today-Axis My India exit poll suggests that nearly 40 per cent of the electorate below 35 voted for the BJP—this is almost a percentage point less than the Congress. "The bulk of them returned to the party in the past six months," claims a BJP leader. The BJP had fielded 22 new faces, 14 of them younger than even Dhami; 18 of them won. Dhami's promise to bring new faces into government may have been fulfilled a little more thoroughly than he intended, but there's hope for him. While beginning the process to select a new CM, the BJP is open to reinstating him should he get re-elected to the assembly in the next six months. MLAs Suresh Gariya (Kapkot) and Kailash Chandra Gahtori (Champawat) have offered to vacate their seats for Dhami to contest. BJP leaders in Delhi believe Dhami did well to contain anti-incumbency and should be compensated. ■

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL
CM N. Biren Singh in Saikul, Kangpokpi district, Manipur

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

MANIPUR

BJP COMES INTO ITS OWN

THE BJP VICTORY IN MANIPUR RESTED ON ITS GOVERNMENT'S SUCCESS IN CLAMPING DOWN ON VIOLENCE, DELIVERY OF WELFARE SCHEMES AND AN OPPOSITION IN DISARRAY

By KAUSHIK DEKA

IN **AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW** with INDIA TODAY almost a year ago, Chief Minister N. Biren Singh said: "We (the BJP) are working towards winning the next assembly poll on our own." That mission now accomplished, he can heave a sigh of relief. The most important result of this victory is that his position remains safe for now—which is why he had aimed at not just winning, but securing a solo majority too.

In his first tenure, Biren Singh faced multiple challenges for his position as chief minister, both from members of his own party and from allies, particularly the NPP (National People's Party). Now, with the BJP having a majority of its own, troubles from allies will be minimised. More importantly, since this incremental victory (from 21 seats in 2017 to 32 now) was achieved under Biren Singh's leadership, the BJP's unlikely to name someone else chief minister, even though no chief ministerial candidate was announced going into the polls.

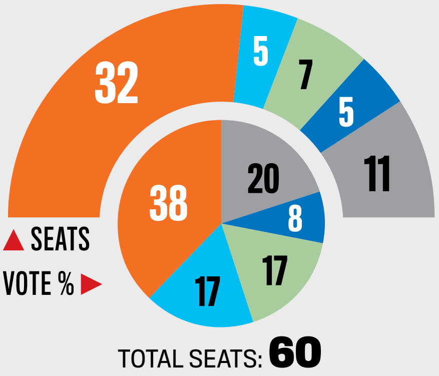
HOW THE BJP WON MANIPUR

If the BJP government in Manipur can claim one undisputed achievement, it is the massive drop in terror-related incidents in the state. Not long ago, all Manipur—including state capital Imphal—would come to a standstill after sunset. In the past five years, it has enjoyed a period of relative peace. In 2017, the year Biren Singh took charge, 55 people (including 23 civilians)

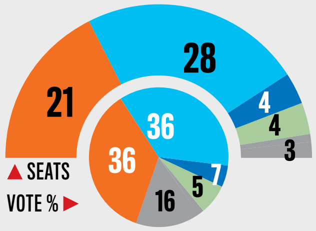
SWEPT AWAY

The BJP won large segments of the Hindu and Christian vote

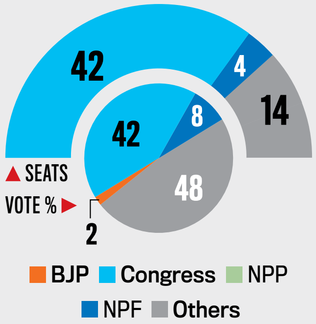
Assembly
2022



Assembly
2017



Assembly
2012



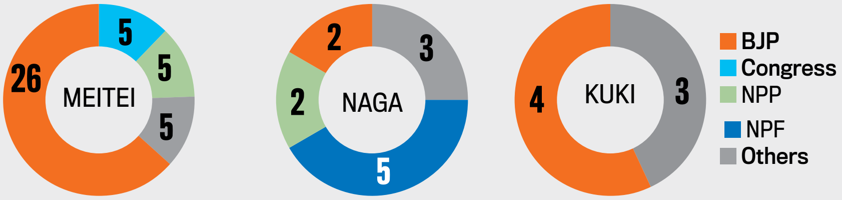
HOW MANIPUR VOTED IN 2022

GEOGRAPHIC BREAK-UP

IMPHAL VALLEY AND JIRIBAM
SEATS: **41**

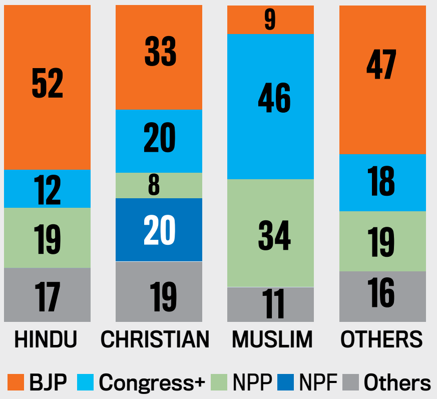
HILLS: NAGA
SEATS: **12**

HILLS: KUKI
SEATS: **7**



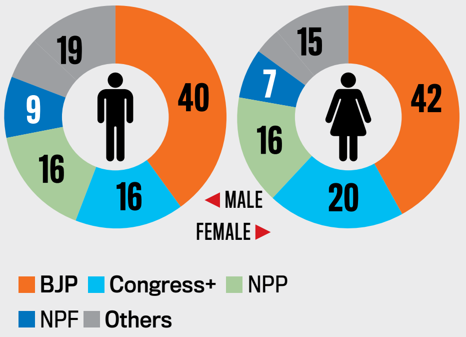
BREAK-UP OF VOTES

RELIGIOUS SPLIT



(Hindus and Christians make up 41 per cent each of the population; 8.4 per cent follow Islam and 7.8 per cent Sanamahism)

GENDER GAP



(Female voters: 1,057,336; Male voters: 990,627; Data for 2022)

Source: India Today-Axis My India Exit poll

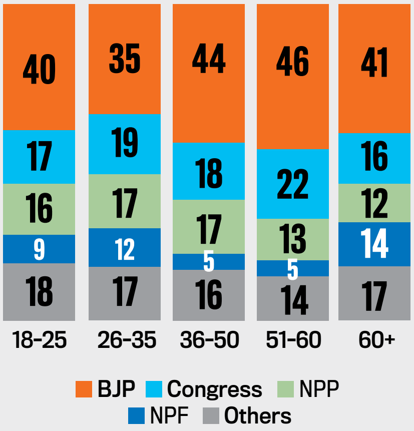
were killed in terror-related incidents. In 2020, the figure was down to seven, with one civilian casualty. Though the figure spiked to 27 in 2021 (including seven civilians), this is something that often happens in pre-election years. “There is no doubt the past five years have been peaceful. And the BJP has benefited from this,” says Professor Rajen Singh Laishram, head of the department of political science at Manipur University.

The BJP was also able to keep a lid on ethnic conflict. Of Manipur’s 60 assembly constituencies, 40 are in valley areas, across six districts. The remaining 20 constituencies are spread over 10 districts. The valley districts, dominated by Meiteis, account for about 11 per cent of the state’s area, but are home to 57.2 per cent of the population (about 1.6 million of the state’s 2.8 million people, as per Census 2011). The remaining 42.8 per cent lives in the hill districts, which are dominated by Nagas and Kukis.

There is a long history of ethnic rivalry between these three communities. Economic blockades are frequently adopted as a form of protest and self-assertion. In fact, just before the 2017 poll, the state saw a four-month-long economic blockade called by the United Naga Council to protest the creation of seven new districts. In the past five years, the state has not seen a single economic blockade. “That shows the intent of our government. We have taken care of the demands of every community without hurting the interest of any,” says Biren Singh.

Biren Singh also became the first chief minister in 15 years to be given a red-carpet welcome by local Naga communities in Ukhrul district, which has not only given the state two Naga chief ministers (Yangmaso Shazia and Rishang Keishing) but is also home to

BY THE AGES



WHY MANIPUR WENT SAFFRON

1. The atmosphere of calm, with no major insurgent activities in the past five years. There have been no road blockades either, which used to cause immense distress to the general public

2. Timely delivery of welfare benefits. The state government also introduced a health insurance scheme

3. The efforts to bridge the gap between the people in Imphal valley and the hills

4. Candidate selection–the BJP poached over a dozen 'winnable' candidates from Congress

5. The Congress's disarray left the field open for other parties

NSCN (IM) general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah. Under the former Congress government, whenever Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh visited Ukhrul, locals would boycott the visit, the town would remain shut and bombs would go off prior to his arrival. The BJP believes this changed equation is a consequence of Biren Singh's outreach programme, 'Go to [the] Hills', aimed at delivering the benefits of welfare schemes directly to the doorsteps of people in the tribal-dominated hills. What also worked in the BJP's favour was its alliance with the Naga People's Front (NPF), a pro-Naga party—this made it easier for the state to reach out to Naga civil society.

However, elections in Manipur are never won only on party lines. The winnability (or lack thereof) of candidates often determines the outcome. Victory margins are also often narrow, since Manipur's constituencies have an average electorate size of 32,000. Realising this, the BJP made sure to import "winnable candidates" from other parties, primarily the Congress. (Around a dozen BJP candidates in this election were Congress members in the last.) "We chose only those who had the highest possibility of winning. I even opposed [giving a] ticket to my brother," says Biren Singh.

If the BJP walked the extra mile for victory, the Congress has remained a disordered house for the past five years. The dissent against former CM Okram Ibobi Singh kept growing, resulting in high attrition—15 of 28 Congress MLAs joined the BJP—but the Congress national leadership did little damage control. In the past five years, the party has also gone through three AICC (All India Congress Committee) in-charges for Manipur and three presidents for the state unit. In contrast, the BJP invested heavily in organisation building and electoral planning, regularly sent top national leaders to the state and even made symbolic gestures like Prime Minister Narendra Modi wearing a *lengyan* (traditional Manipuri scarf) during a televised speech in 2020.

WHILE THE BJP WALKED THE EXTRA MILE FOR VICTORY, THE CONGRESS REMAINED A DISORDERED HOUSE

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Despite the pro-incumbency and a decisive mandate, Biren Singh admits that a lot remains to be done, especially in terms of developing infrastructure. More than that, the new government will also have to deal with soaring unemployment: at over nine per cent, the second highest in the northeast. With few other options, most youngsters in Manipur—which accounts for 0.16 per cent of India's GDP and has a per capita income half the national average—depend on government jobs. Yet, the government has not been hiring since 2020, when the pandemic hit. Several recruitment examinations were conducted, but the results are not out. Biren Singh had promised to declare these results immediately after coming to power. He must not only keep his promise but also fill the nearly 19,000 vacancies in the state government. The disgruntlement among the youth is palpable. The BJP got its lowest share of support from those aged 26-35—the group that is seeking jobs—according to the India Today-Axis My India exit poll.

There is also a careful balancing act ahead for Biren Singh. If the BJP's former ally NPP remains out of power, it could choose to reignite the debate over the repeal of AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act). Though Biren Singh has already said he is personally against the draconian law, he could face increasing pressure to convince the Centre to lift it. And though the NPF will be part of the government, Biren Singh must avoid friction with it, which could make the relative peace in the hills short-lived.

In fact, the expectations of the BJP government (both in the state and at the Centre) will be very high. The electoral politics in Manipur have often aligned with the ruling party at the Centre as the state depends heavily on central assistance for development. This time, with a decisive majority in both governments, there will be few credible excuses for non-delivery. ■

GETTY IMAGES

LESSONS IN THE DEFEAT

NO RIVAL COULD MATCH THE BJP'S ORGANISATIONAL STRENGTH OR BEAT ITS NARRATIVE. FINDING A WAY OUT OF THE DISARRAY AHEAD OF 2024 WON'T BE EASY

By KAUSHIK DEKA

ALLIANCE GAMES
(Clockwise) Mamata Banerjee with Akhilesh Yadav in UP; Arvind Kejriwal during the Punjab campaign; Rahul Gandhi at Amethi

ANI

ANI

IN **2012, THE SAMAJWADI PARTY BAGGED** 227 of Uttar Pradesh's 403 assembly seats with just over 29 per cent of the vote share and formed the government. A decade later, the party increased its vote share to 32 per cent, but could win only 111 seats, failing to pose any significant challenge to the BJP, which has retained over 40 per cent vote share in the past four polls in the state—the 2014 and 2019 general elections, and the 2017 and 2022 assembly polls.

This absolute dominance of the saffron party in India's most politically significant state, which elects 80 Lok Sabha MPs, indicates the magnitude of the challenge opposition parties face. That the incumbent BJP is set to form the government in UP, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur underscores the fact that the opposition parties failed to match its organisational strength and narrative, despite discontent triggered by the adverse economic impact of the Covid pandemic.

The only glimmer of hope for the Opposition is AAP's landslide victory in Punjab, with 92 seats in the 117-member house. It makes AAP the only non-BJP, non-Congress party to be in power in more than one state. Speculation has now begun over the possibility of Arvind Kejriwal leading an opposition alliance in 2024. Those in favour of this proposition claim that the Punjab win proves Kejriwal's credentials as a leader with acceptance beyond Delhi.

There are many hurdles, however, in the way of AAP becoming the fulcrum of opposition unity, with no consensus yet on the structure and leadership of any proposed anti-BJP alliance. There have been several contenders, from West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee to Telangana CM K. Chandrashekar Rao. The Congress, the only national party in the Opposition, still sees itself as the pivot of any alliance. "There can't be an Opposition without Congress, given its pan-India presence," says a member of the Congress Working Committee.

A similar narrative had emerged after the TMC's 2021 victory in Bengal. Mamata was projected as the leader around whom the Opposition could rally in 2024. She visited several opposition leaders, including Kejriwal, NCP chief Sharad Pawar and Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray. In a bid to expand its national footprint, her party aggressively participated in the Goa elections, but ended up drawing a blank. AAP's Punjab success, however, could paradoxically provide the Bengal-based party a model to experiment with in other states and eventually challenge AAP at its own game. "AAP took almost 10 years to win Punjab. We started expanding only after 2021. Let's see

HOW THE OPPOSITION PERFORMED

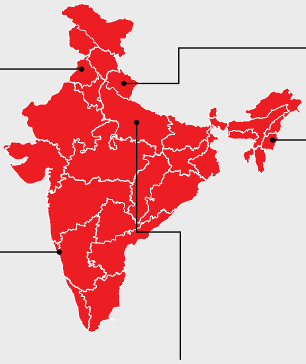
Barring AAP in Punjab, BJP's rivals had a disastrous outing in the other four states, with the Congress touching new lows in Uttar Pradesh and Manipur

SEATS WON in 2022

■ Congress ■ AAP
■ TMC ■ SP ■ BSP

↑ Gain ↓ Loss

DNP: Did not participate



PUNJAB

TOTAL SEATS: **117**

18 ↓ -59
92 ↑ +72
DNP ↑ NA
DNP ↑ NA
1 ↑ +1

UTTARAKHAND

TOTAL SEATS: **70**

19 ↑ +8
0 ↓ 0
DNP ↑ NA
0 ↑ 0
0 ↑ 0

GOA

TOTAL SEATS: **40**

11 ↓ -6
2 ↑ +2
0 ↑ 0
DNP ↑ NA
DNP ↑ NA

UTTAR PRADESH

TOTAL SEATS: **403**

2 ↓ -5
0 ↑ 0
DNP ↑ NA
110 ↑ +63
1 ↓ -18

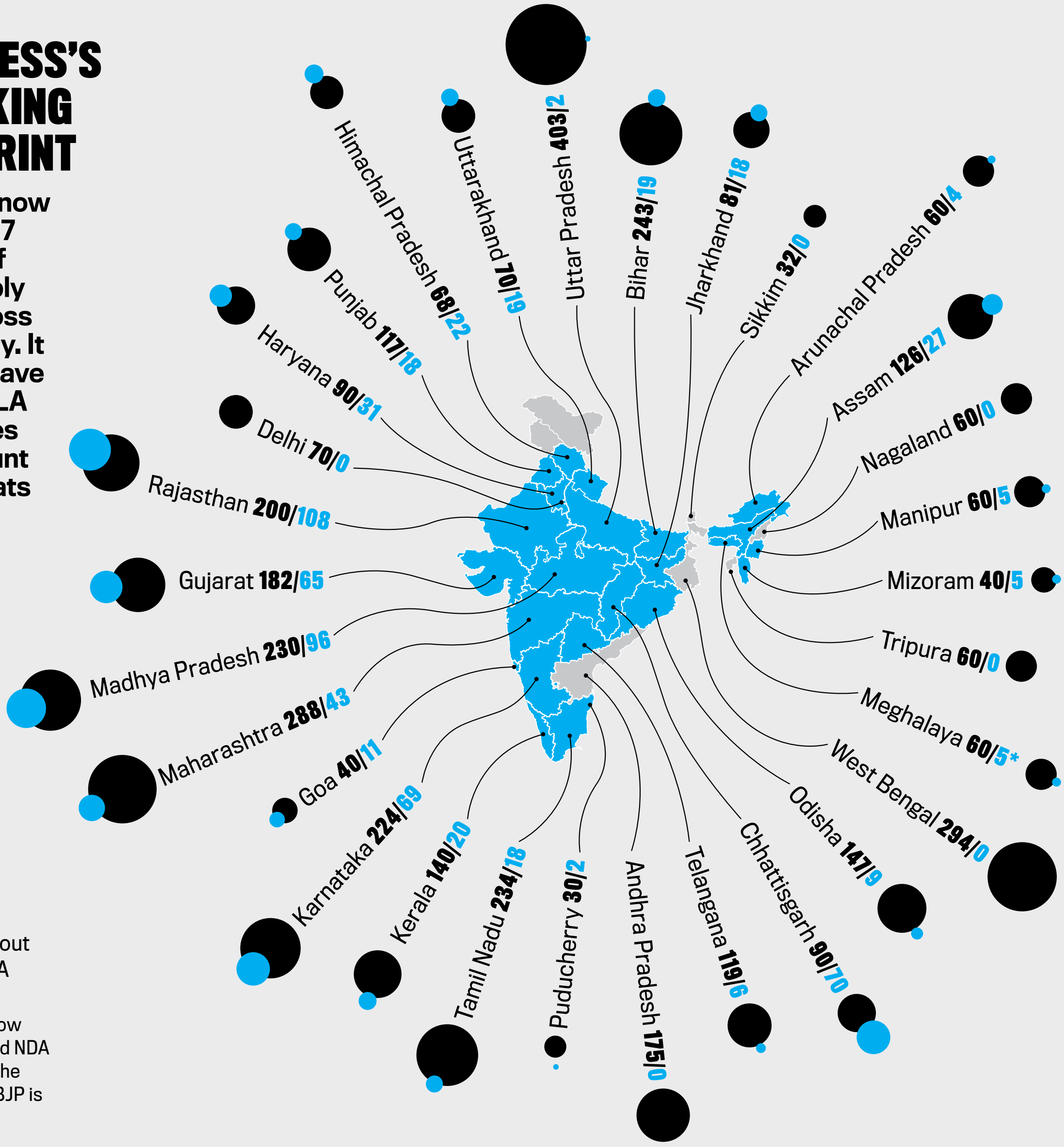
MANIPUR

TOTAL SEATS: **60**

5 ↓ -23
DNP ↑ NA
DNP ↑ NA
DNP ↑ NA
DNP ↑ NA

CONGRESS'S SHRINKING FOOTPRINT

The party now occupies 17 per cent of all assembly seats across the country. It does not have a single MLA in six states that account for 691 seats



● Total seats

● Congress seats

● States without Congress MLA

*These MLAs now support NPP-led NDA government in the state of which BJP is also a partner what happens in the years ahead," says a TMC MP.

What may also go against AAP is that Delhi and Punjab account for only 20 Lok Sabha seats, while Bengal sends 42 members to the lower house and the two Congress-ruled states—Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh—send 37. Moreover, AAP's success in assembly elections has not been reflected in its Lok Sabha tally. In Delhi, it could not win a single seat in the past two general elections, and in Punjab, where it bagged 20 assembly seats in 2017, its Lok Sabha tally dropped from four in 2014 to just one in 2019. "It shows Kejriwal is not seen as an alternative to Prime Minister Narendra Modi," says Manoj Tewari, BJP MP from Delhi.

AAP's real test now will be the Gujarat assembly poll later this year, where it expects to convert the bipolar BJP-Congress contest into a three-cornered one. The BJP has not lost a single election—assembly or Lok Sabha—here in more than two decades. Though the Congress put up a tough contest in 2017, adding 16 seats to its assembly tally, the BJP made a clean sweep of all 26 Lok Sabha seats in both 2014 and 2019. "AAP's entry will only divide the anti-BJP vote, eventually helping us," says a Gujarat BJP leader who did not want to be named.

Besides Gujarat, 10 other states—Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Telangana, Tripura, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram—will go to polls before the 2024 general election. Together, they account for 146 Lok Sabha seats, of which the BJP occupies 121. Congress is the only party that challenges the BJP in all these states, except Telangana. In Gujarat, Himachal, Chhattisgarh, MP and Rajasthan, which account for 95 seats, it's almost a direct contest between the national parties. In Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, Congress has been in power since 2018. It had also won the 2018 MP assembly poll with a thin margin. Yet, it could send only three MPs from these states in 2019.

For the grand old party, that is the existential challenge—in general elections, it has failed to present itself as an alternative to the BJP even in states where it is a direct challenger. State victories too have become rarer. Congress now occupies only 692 of the 3,933 assembly seats—17 per cent—across the country. Not surprisingly, there has been a growing murmur among its leaders, particularly veterans, for a change of leadership.

THE ONLY GLIMMER OF HOPE FOR THE OPPOSITION IS AAP'S LANDSLIDE VICTORY IN PUNJAB, WHERE IT WON 92 OF 117 SEATS

Though Sonia Gandhi is the party president, Rahul Gandhi remains the de facto head. Rahul and his sister Priyanka Vadra backed Navjot Singh Sidhu in his rebellion against Captain Amarinder Singh, who was forced to resign as Punjab CM. The wipeout in Punjab and UP—where Priyanka was party in-charge—will likely embolden the anti-Rahul faction. Detractors blame him for the debacle in Uttarakhand as well, where many political observers expected Congress to outperform the BJP.

"The Gandhi brand name has lost its USP. In Punjab and Uttarakhand, Rahul and his cronies were more interested in harassing veterans than strategising for victory. Priyanka was a non-starter in UP. It is time Congress got rid of the Gandhis," says a Congress Lok Sabha MP, adding that Rahul's return as party president in September is no longer a foregone conclusion. Former Union minister Shashi Tharoor has already asked for a change in the "organisational leadership".

Even likely allies are unwilling to accept Rahul as the face of an anti-BJP alliance. While Mamata declared the UPA's end, Sharad Pawar has said the Congress must introspect about its leadership and not aspire to be the leading force in the opposition alliance. Yet, even Pawar has accepted that the Congress's pan-India presence makes it the only party that can provide a national alternative to the BJP.

Indeed, electoral arithmetic makes the Congress indispensable. While it is in government in four states—three on its own and two as a junior coalition partner—the party is a key opposition player in 15 states. In Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal, MP, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand, there's a direct Congress-BJP contest. The Congress's abject failure in these states, where it won only four of the 102 Lok Sabha seats, has been a key factor behind the BJP's successive victories in general elections.

In Punjab, Assam, Karnataka, Kerala, Haryana, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Goa, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland, which account for 155 of the 543 Lok Sabha seats, the Congress can play a deciding role and distance from the party would mean further dividing the anti-BJP votes. Moreover, the party came second in 196 of the 403 seats it contested in 2019, though it could win only 52.

So, while the shape of the opposition alliance could be decided post-polls, its existence and success will depend on how various opposition parties perform in their respective strongholds in 2024. With little common ground, they will need to create an appealing narrative to convince voters that one of them could emerge as an alternative to Modi. ■

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Managing Director &
CEO, Kotak Mahindra Bank

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INDIA TODAY
STATE OF THE STATES
TAMIL NADU FIRST

The Southern Powerhouse

As Tamil Nadu goes from strength to strength, experts debate how it can become India's leading state

By Amarnath K. Menon

Launched in 2003, the India Today's annual State of the States (SOS) survey has, over the years, not only become the most respected barometer of how different states in India are performing across vital development indices, but also come to serve as a report card of the nation. The states are ranked judging by their performance in several categories, like economy, infrastructure, industry, agriculture, health, education, law and order and governance.

For four years in a row now Tamil Nadu has emerged as the

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Photographs by CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

HOW TO MAKE TAMIL NADU THE INDUSTRIAL HUB OF THE COUNTRY

TAKEAWAYS

1. Aim for a growth rate of 15 per cent in manufacturing and attract investments to the tune of Rs 10 lakh crore.
2. Focus on existing investors as they will be able to attract more.
3. Address issues related to land acquisition sensitively and quicken approvals.
4. Finetune the 2021 Tamil Nadu fintech policy so that the FinTech City planned at Nandambakkam evolves as the fintech capital of India.
5. Reduce the skill gap and provide more employment, even as the state shifts focus from engineering to vocational programmes.
6. Promote greater technology in the agriculture sector and help support MSMEs through financial programmes.

best performing big state with consistent and credible performance across parameters, even in the wake of the devastating Covid-19 pandemic.

On March 4, India Today held the Tamil Nadu First Conclave in Chennai, the first in its series of individual conclaves to be held across all states in India. "The idea," said India Today Group Editorial Director (Publishing) Raj Chengappa in his introductory remarks, "is to provide a forum to debate key development issues of a particular state, invite the best strategists to exchange their views and come up with out-of-the-box solutions to speed up the states's progress and provide prosperity and happiness to its citizens".

With a gross state domestic product of $297 billion (Rs 22.44 lakh crore), he added, Tamil Nadu is India's second-largest economy. Chief minister M.K. Stalin's dream now is to make Tamil Nadu a trillion-dollar economy by 2030, with a focus on boosting manufacturing and services while giving priority to government's welfare measures to ensure social justice and, what Stalin calls, the Dravidian model. And for this, the vibrant state with its population of 84.96 million can leverage its several strengths.

CHIEF MINISTER M.K. STALIN WANTS TAMIL NADU TO BECOME A TRILLION-DOLLAR ECONOMY BY 2030

In the industrial sector, Tamil Nadu has always been a front runner. In fact, 17 per cent of all industries in the country are located in the state. Chennai alone accounts for 60 per cent of the country's automotive exports, making it India's largest automobile cluster. Tamil Nadu also accounts for about 70 per cent of India's passenger vehicle exports and 45 per cent of the total auto exports from India. It is now among the top 10 auto manufacturing hubs in the world.

In textiles, too, Tamil Nadu is a leader. Coimbatore is the hub of the textile industry in south India, housing around 15 per cent of the textile mills in the country. Plus, the state has the largest spinning industry in India, accounting for 40 per cent of the total production.

Dr. Palanivel Thiaga Rajan,
Finance Minister, Tamil Nadu

“I am against authoritarian centralising”

Tamil Nadu Finance Minister **Dr PALANIVEL THIAGA RAJAN** *believes GDP numbers mean little if development fails to touch the lives of the poorest of the poor. The former global financial markets analyst spoke to India Today Group Editorial Director (Publishing)* **RAJ CHENGAPPA** *at the 'Tamil Nadu First' conclave. Excerpts:*

Q. Your chief minister wants to make Tamil Nadu a $1 trillion economy...
It is good to have goals as they hold you accountable. To get to a $1 trillion economy in three years, what we need to do is get about 14-14.5 per cent nominal growth rate that includes inflation, if you assume the effective rate is roughly the same. Right now, inflation is around 6.5 per cent; if I take that out, it means I need to get about 7.5-8 per cent growth, which is not that hard to achieve.

Q. Tamil Nadu has always believed in being a welfare state even as it tries to be an industrial state. How do you balance the books?
The notion that a welfare state cannot be a capitalist or an industrialist state is fundamentally flawed. Around the world, societies that are compassionate try to reduce economic discrimination and be inclusive, have the best economy. If you take India, Tamil Nadu spends more than anybody on all these things and has one of the best outcomes in human and social development indicators, gross enrolment ratio in high school/ college, etc. The more compassionate and caring you are...the more productivity and greater growth you will have. There is no contradiction.

Q. Your white paper pointed to declining resource contribution from the Centre. How unequal is this relationship now?
At an existential level, I am against this notion of authoritarian centralising. But let's assume that's irrelevant. At the execution level, it is crazy to sit in Delhi and design one type of programme for the entire country. Take the example of Swachh Bharat—they said we build toilets; no problem. They say we will go directly to the local body, fund them and they build toilets. Okay. The CAG report shows many flaws—no problem. But the biggest problem is that once you build the toilets, who supplies the water? Not the Centre, right? It's the panchayat or the corporation. You can't manage the water supply of every panchayat from Delhi, right? The decision should be made by the locals.

▲ THE CHALLENGES IN DEVELOPING TAMIL NADU AS A ONE TRILLION-DOLLAR ECONOMY

TAKEAWAYS

1. Treat the budget as a prospective document which gives intent and which, if conservative, makes estimates that are comfortable and achievable.
2. Work towards about 14-14.5% nominal growth rate, including inflation of about 6.5 per cent, to get to a trillion dollar economy.
3. Remove rights and controls imposed at the national level by the Centre.

Q. Tamil Nadu is considered the second-largest industrial state. But since 2011, your ranking at the national level has been dropping.
How do you measure or rate these things? Right now, Tamil Nadu has about Rs 10,000-15,000 per capita lower income than Gujarat. But, almost no girl under 15 is not in school in Tamil Nadu; 15-20 per cent of them are not in school in Gujarat. What kind of growth do I want? There are four doctors for every 1,000 people in Tamil Nadu. There is only one doctor for every thousand people in Gujarat. What kind of society do I want? GDP numbers are not everything. We have a way of life that we want to protect and preserve, what the CM calls the Dravidian model. We will implement this and whatever the shortcomings over the past 10 years, we will be back on top again in the next five years. I am 100 per cent sure.

(For full interview, visit Indiatoday.in)

This has helped Tamil Nadu earn the No.1 rank among all Indian states in apparel production and No.2 in textiles. Moreover, this sector provides employment to 35 per cent of the state's population. Tirupur is the biggest knitting cluster in the country and contributes to 90 per cent of the knitwear exports.

Agriculture continues to be the largest source of livelihood in the state. This sector has played a big role in reducing rural poverty over the years. Tamil Nadu is one of India's leading horticulture states, thanks to its diversified agro-climatic conditions suitable for a wide range of horticulture crops. It is planning to set up a major agro-industrial corridor, including in the infrastructure deficit Cauvery delta districts.

The reason behind Tamil Nadu's exceptional progress in all these sectors is its strong focus on literacy. With 82.9 per cent literacy, the state has done exceptionally well in the field of education. It has the highest number of deemed universities and the highest share (18 per cent) of technical institutions in India. It is home to 37 colleges ranked in the top 100 in the country.

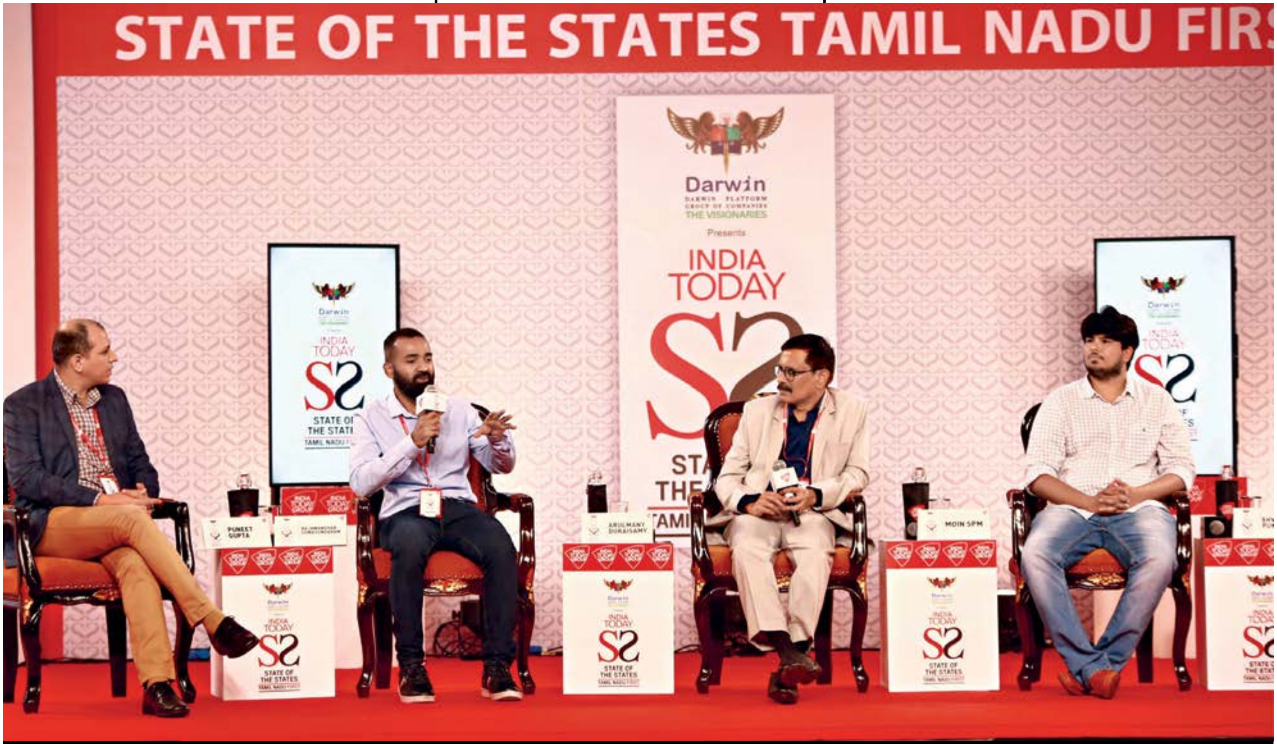
Despite these impressive numbers, there are areas of concern. The 15th Finance Commission report points out that Tamil Nadu's revenue to fiscal deficit ratio has been approaching 50 per cent in recent years. This implies that most borrowings are being used to finance its revenue deficit, which implies less money for capital expenditure. Another concern is that rural indebtedness now impacts 61 per cent of farm households in the state, which is much higher than the national average of 47 per cent. The power and transport sector are in need of urgent reforms as well.

The Tamil Nadu Conclave saw experts from across fields come together to offer prescriptions for different sectors for the state to grow at an even faster pace. ■

▼ START-UP SAGA: CAN CHENNAI BE THE NEXT BENGALURU FOR START-UPS?

TAKEAWAYS

1. Make matters of space and space technology accessible to the common man.
2. Value and recognise hardware start-ups with state helping provide infrastructure.
3. Treat start-ups as customers and enable them fulfil compliance issues.
4. Create a mini start-up city to attract more players.
5. Provide continuity with a 15-year long term perspective in the newly introduced FinTech policy.
6. Give priority to service-based sectors.


STATE OF THE STATES TAMIL NADU FIR

(from left) **Puneet Gupta,** *Co- founder, Kaleidofin;* **Rajamanohar Somasundaram,** *CEO & Co-Founder, Aquaconnect;* **Arulmany Duraisamy,** *MD & CEO, Veritas Finance;* **Moin S.P.M.,** *Co-founder & COO, Agnikul*

(from left) **Kadhambari S. Viswanathan**, *Assistant Vice-President, VIT University;* **Dr. Mariazeena** *Johnson, Chancellor, Sathyabama Institute of Science & Technology;* **Dr D. Karthikeyan,** *IAS, Principal Secretary to Government, Higher Education, Tamil Nadu*

▲ HOW TO MAKE TAMIL NADU THE CAPITAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION

TAKEAWAYS

1. Revamp and roll out the new curriculum by the academic year 2022-23.
2. Pursue a two-language policy instead of the three language formula of the New Education Policy.
3. Provide more academic flexibility to all institutes and enlist more skilled teachers to better the quality of education.
4. Impart soft skills training to students with a futuristic approach.
5. Frame a holistic approach to educational finance.

▼ TAMIL NADU'S GREEN REVOLUTION 2.0

TAKEAWAYS

1. Strengthen the value chain in millets by getting Agri firms to invest in millet-based products like energy bars and cookies.
2. Extend support in the form of finance and storage to enable pulse growers get a better price for their crop.
3. Promote genetically modified crops.
4. Launch custom hiring centres to make farm equipment available to small and marginal farmers by skipping the subsidy route.
5. Introduce one crop one district concept for crops like turmeric as it holds potential to increase farm incomes.
6. Handhold farmers to acquire managerial skills as they have to produce more with limited resources in future.

(from left) **V.K.V. Ravichandran,** *Board Member, Global Farmer Network;* **S. Chandramohan,** *Group President, TAFE Ltd, Chennai;* **S. Janakarajan,** *President, South Asia Consortium for Interdisciplinary Water Resources Studies, Chennai;* **Ramesh Chand,** *Member, Niti Aayog*

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▶ MAKING TAMIL NADU THE TOURIST DESTINATION OF THE SOUTH

(from left) **Zubin Songadwala,** *Area Manager, Southern Region, ITC Hotels;* **V. Sriram,** *Historian and Heritage Activist, Chennai;* **Dr. B. Chandra Mohan,** *IAS, Principal Secretary to Government, Tourism, Culture and Religious Endowments and Chairman, Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation*

TAKEAWAYS

1. Launch initiatives so that Tamil Nadu remains No.1 in drawing both domestic and international tourists.
2. Unveil an exclusive Tamil Nadu Tourism policy that accords industry status to the hospitality business.
3. Expand the temple tourism network now that many among the 44,000 odd temples in the state have a website of their own.
4. Develop specific sites as adventure tourism hubs.
5. Promote plantation tourism with tea estate owners showing willingness to come on board.

(from left) **V. Thiruppugazh,** *IAS (Retd), Chairman, Advisory Committee on Mitigation and Management of Flood Risk in Chennai Metro and Disaster Management Expert;* **Jayaram Venkatesan,** *Convener, Arappor Iyakkam, Chennai;* **Nityanand Jayaraman,** *Environmental activist, Chennai;* **Mridula Ramesh,** *Cleantech Investor and Founder, Sundaram Climate Institute*

▲ MAKING CHENNAI THE FUTURE CITY

TAKEAWAYS

1. Improving risk governance by investing in risk reduction; stopping accumulation of risks; creating storage capacity in the upstream and staggering a run-off for mitigating and managing flood risks.
2. Perceive solid waste as a Brahmastra on our back and treat it as a resource that can create thousands of jobs.
3. Consider Chennai's expansion and growth, from 47 sq km in 1980 to 402 sq km, as a double-edged sword and disaster.
4. Treat never-ending growth as something that exacts a price from certain neighbourhoods and communities, like the petroleum refinery and major ports coming up on marshland and island of Katrapalli.

(from left) **V. Thiruppugazh,** *IAS (Retd), Chairman, Advisory Committee on Mitigation and Management of Flood Risk in Chennai Metro and Disaster Management Expert;* **Jayaram Venkatesan,** *Convener, Arappor Iyakkam, Chennai;* **Nityanand Jayaraman,** *Environmental activist, Chennai;* **Mridula Ramesh,** *Cleantech Investor and Founder, Sundaram Climate Institute*

▲ CAN TAMIL NADU FORGE A FEDERAL FRONT?

TAKEAWAYS

1. Realise every state has its own expression and is answerable only to the Constitution of India.
2. Brace for the next Lok Sabha election in which federal forces, represented by political parties that wield influence in one or more states, play a more effective role.
3. Respect a state's policies and culture as it nurtures federalism.
4. Encourage democratic parties as they will admit pluralism.
5. Allow one to be a Tamilian, so that they can blossom as an Indian.

SIDELIGHTS

1. S.Peter Alphonse & **T.K. S. Elangovan** with supporters

2. Ajay Harinath Singh, Founder, Darwin Platform Group of Companies

3. Mahesh Raghvan, musician and composer

4. K. Pandiarajan, former minister, Tamil Nadu, AIADMK

KATHMANDU TRIENNALE: BURSTING THE CANON
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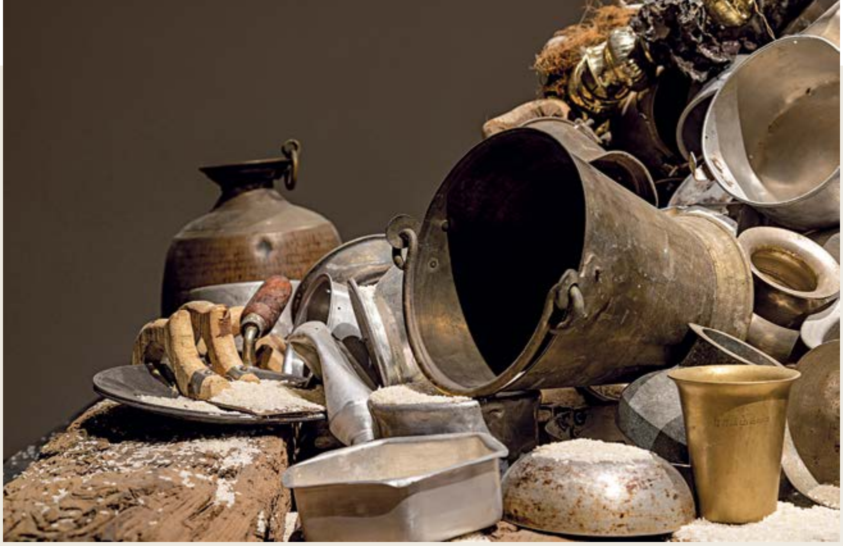
"I don't make art for the market. No artist makes art for the market. My art is not by demand"

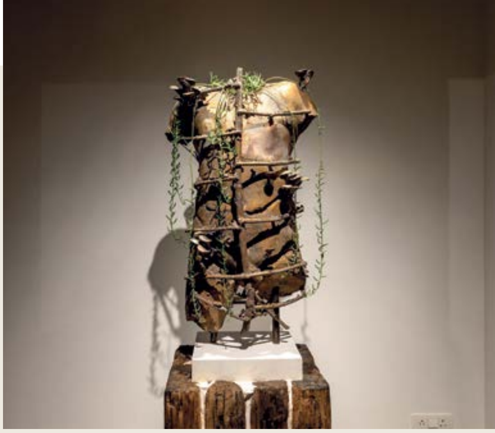
ART

BIG AND BRASSY

Artist-sculptor **Subodh Gupta** is back with the kind of grand statement that first helped him make a name

Photographs by BANDEEP SINGH





BRINGING IT HOME
Images of Subodh Gupta's installations at his latest exhibition, *Cosmic Battle*

S

Subodh Gupta's show *Cosmic Battle* (on view at the Nature Morte gallery, New Delhi until April 10) includes a kinetic sculpture he has named 'Self-portrait'. As often happens with Gupta's art, this work, too, is made up of several cooking utensils. With the artist or his face nowhere to be seen, the question asks itself: How is this a self-portrait? "It's an ode to my childhood memories," Gupta tells us. "As a child, I remember my mother performing elaborate *pooja* with bricks, sand, rice, mango leaves, coconuts and some flowers arranged on a brass *thali*. We grew up with such rituals which were like installation/ performance art for us. This self-portrait is a *jugalbandi* between me and my mother."

'Self-portrait' has been refashioned from aluminium, brass and stainless steel—everyday materials that Gupta, 58, has been using for the last three decades to examine his roots. Collectors today stump up millions to acquire his interpretations of both the world and the great Indian kitchen. Gupta's preferred term for his art is "naturally theatrical". A theatre artist in college, Gupta's concepts have always been informed by ideas of performance. "I don't miss being an actor at all. That was a phase in my life. Now, I create drama through my sculptures. I now perform through my paintings," he laughs.

For Gupta, the kitchen utensil is more than plain metaphor. He says, "In one of his poems, Sant Kabir writes about an earthen pot inside which he found the creator and stars. I think this idea sits very well with my sculptures." Gupta also believes that every utensil contains in it a different multitude of stories: "Old utensils have so much character. Imagine the many individuals who have eaten food in it. I don't know them personally but I can guess who they are. That's why you see dents and marks on the plates. It's like the human palm. When you take a photograph of a palm, it looks like the cosmos."

A THEATRE ARTIST IN COLLEGE, SUBODH GUPTA'S CONCEPTS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN INFORMED BY IDEAS OF PERFORMANCE

Though Gupta usually creates his large-scale works in his Gurugram studio, he also sometimes outsources them to production houses abroad—in countries like China, South Korea, the US and Germany. He is eager to dispel the notion that his works are all gargantuan. "In my entire career, I must have hardly done 20-30 large sculptures. The rest are all smaller works, many of them happen to be paintings." Originally trained as a painter, he says, "I enjoy painting very much. In fact, in between outdoor sculptures, I simply paint when I find time." Would Gupta return to the canvas if there was no market pressure to consistently churn out larger-than-life art? "I don't

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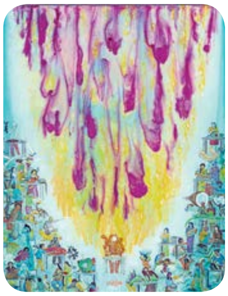
Rahal has used almost every art form–sculptural installations, drawings, paintings, writing, even an AI programme–to transform JNAF into a crypt that houses imagined relics of a post-human civilisation.



◂ STOMACH STUDIO
N.S. HARSHA
Vadehra Art Gallery, Delhi
On till May 2, 2022

Though there is great irony in Harsha's work, his art also has empathy. You might laugh when you see his depictions of monkeys or RT-PCR tests, but you're sure to detect a vulnerability, too.

make art for the market," he replies, tersely. "No artist makes art for the market. My art is not by demand."

Gupta's art may not be a commodity, but he might find it hard to contest the fact that it does remain much in demand. His sculptures have found place in key collections, in India and abroad. With entrepreneurial instincts that match his artistic ability, Gupta has helped transform the profile of the modern artist—from 'tortured and impoverished' to 'rich and famous'. Since there was nobody else like him—perhaps, only M.F. Husain—the press once nicknamed him the 'Damien Hirst of New Delhi'. Today, he rebuffs the comparison: "I'm an international artist. I have my own identity and signature."

Born in Khagaul and educated at the College of Arts and Crafts in Patna, Gupta was always confident he would make it. The only thing he didn't expect was the magnitude of his success. Ironically, for an artist whose methods are often equated with those of the irreverent Frenchman Marcel Duchamp, Gupta reminds us that his college didn't even have a single art history class. The upside was he could break with tradition. He says, "We didn't grow up reading about Duchamp, Picasso or Matisse. All this came to us much later." Only after he had moved to Delhi in 1989 did Gupta get fully exposed to western art.

Meeting his wife Bharti Kher for the first time in 1992 was a turning point for Gupta, both personally and professionally. "Bharti was instrumental in introducing me to a new world," says Gupta, suddenly breaking into Hindi. While Hindi remains his primary language of expression, he says he wants to create the kind of art that thrives on his legacy of being Indian. He adds, "*Nasha kaam banane mein hai, dost* [The intoxication is in creating a work, my friend]. I don't know how else to explain it." ■

–Shaikh Ayaz

◀ THERE IS NOW A WALL

RATHIN BARMAN

Experimenter–Hindustan Road, Kolkata

On till March 26, 2022

The title of the exhibition alludes to a conversation between two squabbling brothers who divide their home by erecting a wall in the centre of its courtyard. It is sculpture at its playful best.

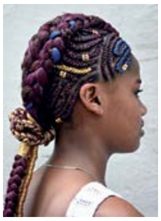
ART

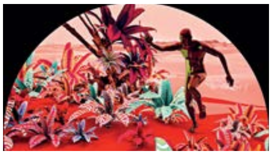
A still from *Dante Katha*; (below, clockwise from left) artworks by Liliana Angulo Cortes; Vvzela Kook; and Cian Dayrit

Bursting the Canon

The Kathmandu Triennale hopes to decolonise art with its focus on heritage and indigenous practices

In 2019, the LAB Collective was born in Darjeeling after a group of fresh graduates from the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, decided to collaborate to tell stories that mattered. Filmmaker Dishant Pradhan, for instance, felt that many things in Darjeeling itself deserved to be seen more, like "Darjeeling's history of identity crisis, colonialism and the movement for separate statehood". What emerged is a Nepali short film titled *Dante Katha*, or oral storytelling. Seen through the eyes of a little girl looking for her missing brother, the film helps you traverse forests, mountains, hear folk tales from the Himalayan regions, all the while transporting you to a magic-realist setting. Along with a zine and a textile installation, LAB is now showing *Dante Katha* at the Kathmandu Triennale (on till March 31).





Dante Katha fits perfectly with the event's larger, overarching theme of decolonisation. With a participation of over 50 artists from more than 25 countries, the event, curated by artistic director Cosmin Costinas, Sheelasha Rajbhandari and Hit Man Gurung, is being pitted as "the largest presentation of contemporary art in Nepal to date". Other themes of the Triennale include migration, displacement and indigenous knowledge; basically, art that goes beyond the Eurocentric canon. Take, for instance, the Hong Kong-based new media artist Vvzela Kook's video 'Columbus of Horticulture', which explores the role of botany in the history of imperialism. Or the Philippine artist Cian Dayrit who "traces the geography of power and the course of empire" through a large handsewn map, in a piece titled 'Valley of Dispossession'. "We wanted to whittle away the parameters drawn on contemporary art that discourage access to indigenous practices, mediums and intangible heritage," says Rajbhandari.

Organised by the Nepal's ministry of culture, tourism and civil aviation and the Siddhartha Arts Foundation, the Triennale will stretch across five venues, each chosen for the context it provides to the 300-odd artworks on display. The exhibition showcasing the ideas and practices of mapping, navigation and cartography is, for example, being hosted inside a former war room that was once used for military strategy and expansion. "[The idea is] to reveal a range of cultural vocabularies of self, body and universe," says Hit Man Gurung. ■

(For a virtual tour of the Kathmandu Triennale, visit Kathmandutriennale.org)

–Sukhada Tatke

DEFYING THE ODDS

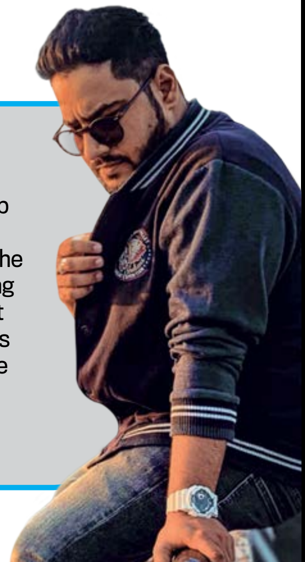
Breakout artists from Jammu & Kashmir

BHAU

Rohit Singh Bhau is a Jammu-based musician and guitarist with two albums—*Phir Se Qareeb* (2018) and *Aadataan* (2021)—to his credit. Love, heartbreak and youth's crossroads are all his forte.

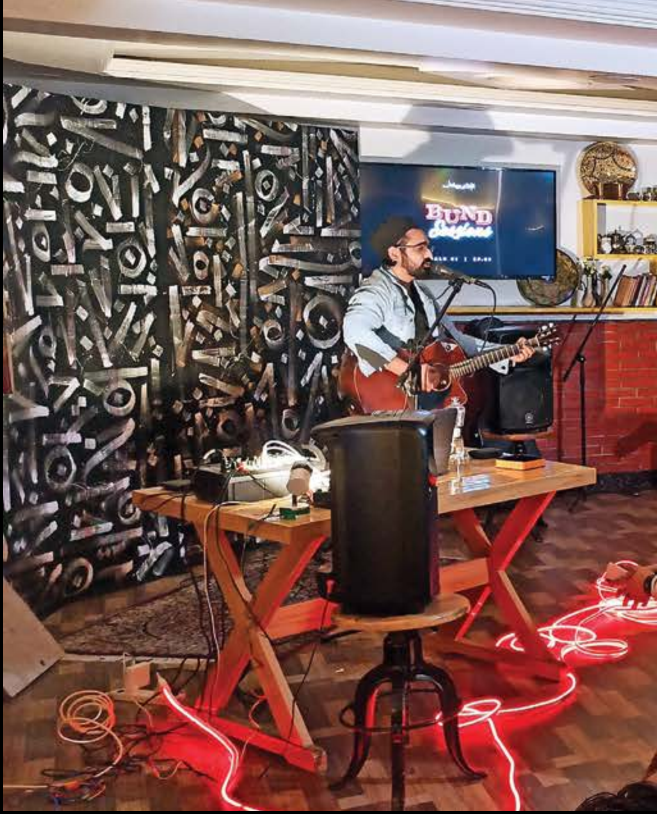
QAFILAH

One of Kashmir's most exciting hip-hop talents, Arif Farooq a.k.a. Qafilah was born and raised in Srinagar. In the last five years, he has released several hit singles like 'Lost Shikara' and 'Safarnama'.



SHEN B

Jammu-based hip-hop artist Shayaan Bhatt came to the fore when he put out 10 tracks during the 17-month Internet clampdown in J&K. His popular tracks include 'LockDown' and 'Fankaar'.



MUSIC

Kashmir's New Songbook

Young Kashmiri musicians are finding their voice in a new live venue in the Valley

Ahmer Javed was still in school when he first heard 50 Cent's 'In da Club' in a Kashmiri internet café. Though taken in by the 'good life' at first, Javed soon came to see that '50 Cent' or 'Fiddy' was only a persona, one that the artist Curtis James Jackson III wore. Digging into hip-hop history, listening to artists like Tupac Shakur and Eminem, Javed began to realise an obvious truth—the genre, ever since its inception, had given a voice to the marginalised sections of society. "They all have their stories and it's something you have to ask yourself: what is *your* story?" says Javed whilst speaking to INDIA TODAY.

Together with artists like Ali Saifuddin and Yawar Abdal, Javed, 26, is translating his experiences into poetry, verse, rhythm and melody, making formidable a new wave of Kashmiri musicians. Understandably, some of the songs coming out of the Valley now reflect the region's political turmoil and its aftermath in the mental health of the Kashmiri people. "If you've lived

UP IN THE VALLEY
(from top)
A musical session at Jhelum Cafe, Srinagar; singers Faheem Abdullah; and Ahmer Javed

here long enough, seen what we have, how can you be untouched? Most people here are suffering from PTSD. That cannot go unnoticed," says Javed.

For Faheem Abdullah, 25, growing up in Kashmir has meant living in constant fear. "But at some point, you become immune," he says. Abdullah learnt how to sing holy verses from the Quran at an early age, but he then quickly graduated to *nazms* and *ghazal*s. It was around 2012, when Abdullah saw the popularity of Arijit Singh and Mohit Chauhan soar, that he decided he, too, could pursue music full-time. Though he did not know how to play an instrument, he says composing has always come naturally to him: "My friends play instruments. They have collaborated with me."

Some of the songs coming out of the Valley reflect the region's political turmoil and its effect on the mental health of the Kashmiri people

Like Javed, Abdullah, too, was born in Srinagar. He believes that while it's important to write about the conflict around him, he also has an equal responsibility to reflect the inner conflict of young Kashmiris. "I think it's always been the job of art to reflect society. Like how Premchand wrote about caste, G. Kalyan Rao wrote about untouchability in Andhra Pradesh, I try to balance the conflicts of the inside and outside."

When asked if Kashmiri artists feel burdened by the responsibility to reflect the truths of their region, Javed gives a realistic, pragmatic response: "I know I can't single-handedly bring about change, that's something the people will have to do. But I think I can use my art and platform to make something that could inspire someone to do the 'right' thing. As a musician, my job is that of a storyteller. Especially, *jinki kahaaniyaan sunaayi nahin deti* [Especially, those whose stories we don't get to hear]."

Of late, artists like Javed and Abdullah have also found a champion in a local business, Jhelum Café. Co-founded by cousins Asim and Adil Khan in 2019, the café soon became a live music venue, a haven for Kashmir's emerging music talent. Adil recounts one emotionally-charged moment: "Ali Saifuddin was singing when some mischievous elements in the crowd tried to disrupt the performance. After they were escorted out, Ali sang 'Aasan Gindaan'. It hyped everyone up. We all became emotional."

As someone who does not censor himself, Abdullah says musicians must be free to raise their concerns in any form they choose. "I know how expression works, and I have the option to be direct or not. It's one of the biggest tools at the disposal of any artist: symbolism. It is, ultimately, in my hands, what I put out." ■

–Tatsam Mukherjee

FOR A NEW GENERATION

OTT

INDIAN OTT PLATFORMS ARE WAKING UP TO THE MANY POSSIBILITIES OF CONTENT GEARED TOWARD YOUNG ADULTS

Netflix's slate includes season two of **MISMATCHED**, a college-set romance that has made stars out of its lead pair, Prajakta Koli and Rohit Saraf

Kuchh young adult mein bata dijiye (Pitch us something in the young adult genre)." Creator Abhishek Yadav has heard this request enough times to realise that he is now the very thing he avoids writing—a stereotype. With three hit shows to his credit—*Kota Factory* (2019-2021, TVF Play/ Netflix), *Hostel Daze* (2019-, Amazon Prime Video) and *Campus Diaries* (2022-, MX Player)—Yadav, the industry feels, knows the pulse of India's youth. An IIT Bombay graduate, Yadav joined The Viral Fever (TVF) and began developing shows that "cater to young adults who are interested in seeing themselves on screen". Interestingly, however, it was not just students who were drawn to these series. "I've realised that even three or four years after graduating, you are still stuck in that world," says Yadav. "Income tax still has not hit you. You thrive on nostalgia of the first crush, the first fight."

As per the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India, 46.9 per cent of India's population is now under the age of 25, but, surprisingly, we have very few shows that are for and about the young. This is in stark contrast to the US, where shows like *Euphoria* (2019-, Disney+ Hotstar), *Riverdale* (2017-, Netflix) and *Stranger Things* (2016-, Netflix) dominate the pop culture landscape. Our burgeoning OTT industry, though, has finally started recognising young adults as a demographic to be courted. Even though TVF has made young adult entertainment its forte with more shows—these include *Flames* (2018-2019, MX Player), *College Romance* (2018-, SonyLIV) and *ImMATURE* (2019-, MX Player)—the onus to develop content for the 18-24 age bracket now no longer rests on them alone.

Netflix, for one, is returning with season two of *Mismatched* (2020-), a college-set romance which has made stars out of its lead pair, Prajakta Koli and Rohit Saraf. The streaming giant also recently announced *The Archies*, a Zoya Akhtar-directed live action musical feature based on the iconic comic. Then there's *Eternally Confused and Eager for Love*, a series about a 24-year-old navigating adulthood and the daunting world of romance. On March 4, Lionsgate Play released its second original, *Jugaadistan*, a college drama with politics, friendship and romance as key themes.

For Mrinalini Khanna, vice president, originals, Lionsgate India, *Jugaadistan* captures "the gamut of not just emotions but also responsibilities the young generation faces, and the ambition and aspiration they have". With an ensemble cast that includes Ahsaas Channa—an actress whose popularity is built on young adult shows such as *Girls Hostel* (2018-, SonyLIV), *Hostel Daze* and *Kota Factory*—*Jugaadistan* looks to go beyond the

SGATE PLAY ORIGINALS
GAADISTAN
VOTE FOR BHATI

(clockwise from top) A poster for Lionsgate Play's *Jugaadistan*; a still from Yadav's *Campus Diaries*; and a still from Netflix's *Mismatched*

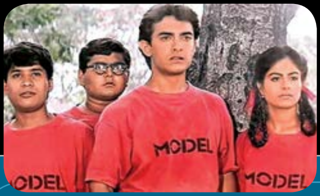
basic romantic tropes of the genre and "capture the zeitgeist of this generation", says Khanna. "It is only when you are young that you are fearless. You make decisions on the spur of the moment. It is a lovely spirit to catch," she adds. "We need to showcase characters who embody the diverse nature of people we meet in college. The people of this generation are very keen to identify who they are and are open about what they do. They want to answer the larger questions of life."

Yadav says he has also noticed that creative heads at streaming platforms are now more receptive to his ideas. "Earlier they'd be like '*Log yeh nahin dekhenge* (People won't watch this), so include some older characters and give them some importance'," he says. "I have had to insist that we don't need to. They now get what I am saying." This is also perhaps because numbers speak for themselves. After leaving TVF, Yadav created *Campus Diaries*, which garnered over a 100 million views within just two weeks of its release. Featuring Saloni Gaur a.k.a. digital creator Salonayyy, the 12-episode youth drama centres around five friends on campus. Unsurprisingly, Yadav, is already busy with developing season two. ■

–Suhani Singh

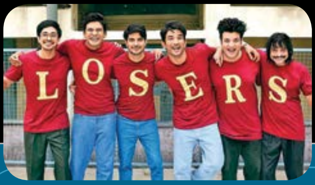
Schools that Rock

Three iconic young adult stories from past and present



Jo Jeeta Wohi Sikandar (1992/ Zee5)
It has been three decades since this film released, but the rivalry between privileged Rajput college brats and the relatively hard-up Model students still feels fresh

Rockford (1999/ Disney+ Hotstar)
Set in a boarding school, this coming-of-age drama offers a tender take on friendship, first crushes and student-teacher relationships



Chhichhore (2019/ Disney+ Hotstar)
Filmmaker Nitesh Tiwari revisited his IIT Bombay days to create this delightful college drama that emphasised the need to focus on one's efforts, not the result

Q + A

KEEPING CALM, CARRYING ON

With her new web show Anamika *just having premiered on MX Player, actor-model* ***Sunny Leone*** *underscores the importance of staying the course*

Q. You were one of the first to take that OTT leap of faith with an autobiographical web series. Did you think streaming would take off in such a big way?
It is the direction the industry should have taken a long time ago. Earlier, if you were on TV or on OTT, it was looked down upon. Because of Covid, things have changed. Now, the idea is to just keep working and keep finding different projects that need not be confined to the big screen.

Q. You are playing the titular part in *Anamika*. Do you feel actresses are getting meatier roles on OTT?
I think it is gender agnostic. We have been seeing different shows that make us go, 'Who is this person? They are amazing.' People across the board are getting to showcase their talent. They couldn't do this earlier because people told them that they had to be in cinemas to be popular.

Q. How difficult has it been to break out of the image you came with?
It has been a rollercoaster. I thought if I just stick around, they will be like, 'She is still here, let's hire her and put her in a film, a song, a show or an ad film.' My mantra was to keep working, get more experience, build more interest. Sometimes my character needs the sexuality to perform better. I am okay with it. Why would I cut myself off from the experience of a show or film?

Q. Has motherhood affected the choices you make now?
Not much. I am not going to ask my four-year-old, 'Hey, should I do this film?' I don't think it's my child's choice to dictate how I live my life. I would like to teach my kids how to make their own decisions and be independent. I may not like that choice but as long as they aren't physically or emotionally hurting someone, they should be able to do what they want in life, too.

—with Suhani Singh

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